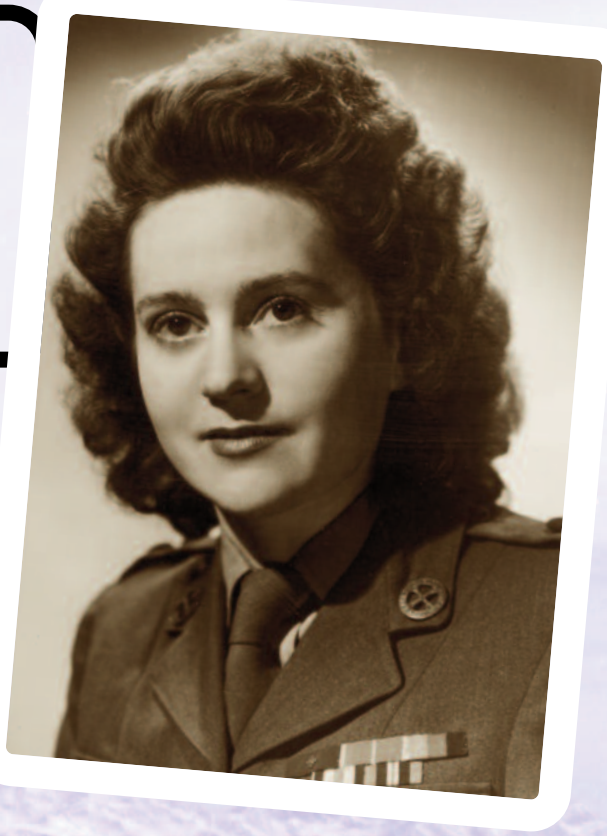
AFTER THE BATTLE



9 770306 154080 21

£3.50

THE ODETTE STORY

Number 121

NUMBER 121

Editor-in-Chief: Winston G. Ramsey
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Published by
Battle of Britain International Ltd.,
Church House, Church Street,
London E15 3JA, England
Telephone: (020) 8534 8833
Fax: (020) 8555 7567
E-mail: hq@afterthebattle.com
Website: www.afterthebattle.com
Printed in Great Britain by
Trafford Print Colour Ltd.,
Shaw Wood Way, Doncaster DN2 5TB.
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After the Battle is published on the 15th of February, May, August and November.

United Kingdom Newsagent Distribution:
Lakeside Publishing Services Ltd, Unit 1D,
Tideway Industrial Estate, Kirtling Street,
London SW8 5BP
United States Distribution and Subscriptions:
RZM Imports, PO Box 995, Southbury, CT, 06488
Telephone: 1-203-264-0774
Toll Free: 1-800-562-7308
Website: www.rzm.com
1 Year subscription (4 issues) $28.00
Canadian Distribution and Subscriptions:
Vanwell Publishing Ltd., PO Box 2131,
1 Northrup Crescent,
St. Catharines, Ontario L2R 7S2.
Telephone: (905) 937 3100 Fax: (905) 937 1760
Toll Free: 1-800-661-6136
E-mail: sales@vanwell.com
Australian Subscriptions and Back Issues:
Technical Book and Magazine Company, Pty, Ltd.,
295 Swanston Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000.
Telephone: 03 9 663 3951 Fax: 03 9 663 2094
E-mail: info@techbooks.com.au
New Zealand Distribution:
Dal McGuirk's "MILITARY ARCHIVE", P.O. Box 24486,
Royal Oak, Auckland 1030 New Zealand.
Telephone: 021 627 870 Fax: 9-6252817
E-mail: milrchiv@mist.co.nz
Italian Distribution:
Tuttostoria, PO Box 395, 1-43100 Parma.
Telephone: ++390521 29 27 33, Fax: ++390521 29 03 87
E-mail: tuttostoria@libero.it
Dutch Language Edition:
SI Publicaties/Quo Vadis, Postbus 282, 6800 AG Arnhem.
Telephone: 026-4462834

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Front Cover: Recreating the filming of *Odette*, the 1950 movie about SOE agent Odette Sansom *(inset top)*. At Plainpalais in the French Alps, Marie Françoise Pallud stands in for Odette in the field where the scene *(inset bottom)* showing Lise on 'the top of the Semnoz' had been filmed. (Jean Paul Pallud)

Centre Pages: Return to Hammelburg. Abe Baum (second row, fourth from left, with cap), in March 1945 commander of Task Force Baum, poses for a group shot with the other participants in the battlefield tour that explored the sites connected with the Hammelburg Raid in March 2003. They are on Hill 427, the spot where Baum's force fought its final battle 58 years ago. (Heiko Haas)

Back Cover: Funeral of Wing Commander Adrian Warburton at the British Military Cemetery at Dürnbach-am-Tegernsee in southern Germany on May 14, 2003. Fifty-eight years after he failed to return from a photo-reconnaissance mission over Germany, Warburton's aircraft was found in August 2002 and his remains recovered from the wreck. (Robin Brooks)

Acknowledgements: The Editor would like to thank Yves Godard, Sylvie Kapturkiewicz, Roger Nicolas, Serge Perrier, Patricia Simoncini of the AGIS Chappuis estate agency, Juliette Spire of the Fresnes Ecomusée and Peter Handford for their assistance with the Spindle story. He and Mike Christensen also extend their appreciation to Chris Turner, Maurice Evans, John McCrickard, Brian Bridgeman, Adrian Vaughan, David Hyde, Rod Priddle, John Barnby and the Curator and staff at the Regimental Museum of the Royal Logistic Corps for their help with the Savernake story.

Photo Credits: IWM - Imperial War Museum, London; USNA - US National Archives.

The Special Operations Executive, known as SOE for short, had been formed in November 1940 to stimulate and assist subversive elements in enemy-held countries. From the very beginning, France held a prominent place in SOE's effort and F Section was created in the summer of 1940. During the war, F Section built up almost 100 independent 'circuits' and sent about 400 agents to France — of whom a quarter did not return. On Foreign Office insistence, F Section was kept out of all contact with the Free French authorities in London and a separate country section — RF Section — was created within SOE in the spring of 1941 to work with the Free French. However, in terms of agents deployed in France, RF Section was never as large as F Section. *Above:* **F Section was, from the end of 1941, commanded by Major Maurice Buckmaster. This picture of him (left) is taken from the movie *Odette* produced in 1950 in which he portrayed himself as the head of F Section.**

This account of SOE's Spindle circuit is mainly based on the post-mission reports of agents and interrogations of witnesses conducted by SOE in 1943, 1944 and 1945. Following the 50-year closure rule, these records are now in the Public Record Office in London (recently ambiguously renamed the National Archives). *Above:* **Jean Paul Pallud (left) also interviewed some of the surviving actors of these events, such as Jean and Simone Cottet, the then-owners of the Hôtel de la Poste, whom he visited in retirement in the south of France. Also Georges Buchet, a former member of the resistance who recovered Arnaud (Adolphe Rabinovitch) and his radio sets from the top of the Semnoz mountain (see page 17). Jean Paul also obtained a copy of a contemporaneous French police report covering the arrest at Saint-Jorioz written on May 9, 1943. As to the PRO reports studied, the more important are the following: interrogation of Adolphe Rabinovitch, October 1943; Roger Bardet, September 1944; Francis Cammaerts, January 1945; Charles Fol, February 1945; Peter Churchill, May 1945; Jacques Latour, May 1945; Odette Sansom, July 1945; Hugo Bleicher, July 1945. These debriefings often conflict with the more complacent accounts of the activities of Spindle commercially published after the war, and with the movie *Odette* which was based on them. Also, it must be recognised that the official history *SOE in France*, written by M. R. D. Foot and published in 1966, aroused a certain amount of controversy when it pertinently questioned the effectiveness of some of Spindle's operations.**

Left: **Peter Moreland Churchill was born in Amsterdam on January 14, 1909, the son of a diplomat attached to the British Embassy. Joining the Army in 1939, he was commissioned in the Intelligence Corps. Fluent in French, he was recruited by SOE's F Section in 1941 and was first landed by submarine on the Riviera coast in January 1942 for a short reconnaissance. He was extracted after a month to help organise submarine landings for other agents and from April he began a longer stay in the Riviera as liaison officer with the Carte network.** *Centre:* **Adolphe Rabinovitch was a Russo-Egyptian jew. Born in Moscow in 1918, he studied botany and entomology in Paris before moving to the United States. In 1939 he enlisted in the French Foreign Legion. Recruited by SOE as a radio operator, he was parachuted into France on the night of August 27/28, 1942 with instructions to make his way to Paris and work for an SOE circuit there but he failed to establish contact and was finally picked up by one of Churchill's men and brought to Cannes.** *Right:* **Odette Sansom, née Brailly, was born in Amiens, France, on April 28, 1912. In 1932 she married an Englishman, Roy Sansom, and moved to England. The couple had three children. In July 1942, she volunteered to return to France as a secret agent and joined the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY), the service which included most of SOE's female members. She was put ashore from a felucca at Cassis on October 31/November 1, 1942, her mission being to join a new circuit in the Auxerre area but she ended up staying with Churchill as his courier.**

SOE AND THE SPINDLE CIRCUIT (THE ODETTE STORY)

By Jean Paul Pallud

In mid-January 1942, when the southern half of France (the so-called 'Zone Libre' governed by Maréchal Philippe Pétain in Vichy) was still free of German or Italian occupation, Michel, an agent of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), arrived on the Riviera by submarine. SOE had been set up in Britain to carry out clandestine operations on the Continent and one particular section, F Section, had been created to work in France which held a prominent place in SOE's effort. Michel (Peter Churchill) was bringing new orders to give to SOE agents Olive (François Basin who operated on the Riviera) and Alain (Emile Duboudin at Lyon). He also had instructions to find out the capabilities of one of the resistance movements, Organisation Carte.

The same Spindle trio as they appear in *Odette* which was made by the husband and wife team of Herbert Wilcox and Anna Neagle. Peter Ustinov portrayed Arnaud (Adolphe Rabinovitch), Trevor Howard was Raoul (Peter Churchill) and Anna Neagle played Lise (Odette Sansom). *Odette* is unique as it included some of the genuine wartime players in its cast and was filmed on some of the authentic locations where the real action occurred.

Michel met Olive, travelled up to Lyon to give his orders to Alain, and then met Carte's leader, André Girard, at Antibes. This passionate opponent of Hitler and Pétain had begun to recruit like-minded disciples soon after the defeat of France in June 1940 and by the beginning of 1942 his contacts were widespread across Vichy France, particularly in the 'Armistice Army' — the small force permitted to remain in being under the terms of the Armistice. Girard, a persuasive talker, convinced Michel that his organisation was exactly what SOE was looking for: a ready-made secret army which simply needed arms and orders to help throw the Germans out of France.

For most of 1942 Carte took the bulk of the attention of SOE's F Section and Michel's only task in France was to act as liaison officer between Carte and SOE. Major Nicholas Bodington, the GSO2 on the F Section staff, came to visit Girard personally in August and the latter then persuaded him that his organisation already had detailed plans for not only initial sabotage teams, but also larger guerrilla groups. These preparations, he said, would lead to the establishment of a secret army, some 300,000 strong, that would join with the Vichy Armistice Army at the right moment and help to liberate France.

Returning to London in mid-September, Bodington submitted an enthusiastic report on Carte. The staff of F Section were delighted with Peter Churchill's efficiency as a liaison officer with Carte and he was sent again to France by parachute on the night of August 27/28 near Montpellier. Churchill was now known under the code-name of Raoul and was the leader of the newly-established Spindle circuit.

Left: ***Odette*** **depicts the first landing of Peter Churchill on the Riviera in mid-January 1942 when he arrived by submarine and paddled ashore in a light canoe. In April 1942 he conducted a number of other parties to and from submarines off the Riviera coast, the kind of operation that was then easy in the southern part of France — the so-called 'Zone Libre' — as it was still completely free of German occupation.** *Right:* **This memorial was erected near the Pointe de l'Ilet at Antibes where Peter Churchill landed from the submarine HMS** ***Unbroken*** **on April 21, 1942.**

At Cannes, the Spindle team also comprised Suzanne (Marie-Louise Blanc) who ran both a beach reception committee and a beauty parlour in the Rue du Canada. *Above:* **Raoul visits Suzanne in her beauty parlour — a still from** ***Odette*****.**

Arnaud (Adolphe Rabinovitch), a wireless operator, had been parachuted 'blind' north of Grenoble on the same night of August 27/28 with instructions to make his way to Paris and work for an SOE circuit there. However, his Grenoble contacts went astray and he laid up for two weeks before he was picked up by one of the Raoul's contacts and brought to Cannes. Raoul, who had just decided to send his own wireless operator, Julien (Isidore Newman), home, asked London to be allowed to retain Arnaud in his place. On the night of October 31/November 1, a small fishing boat brought SOE agent Lise (Odette Sansom) ashore at Cassis. She was to have been moved inland to work as courier for a new circuit in the Auxerre area but she proved so useful to Raoul that he soon persuaded SOE to let her stay with Spindle.

The Spindle team on the Riviera also comprised Suzanne (Marie-Louise Blanc) who ran a beauty parlour and a beach reception committee at Cannes, and Antoine (Antoine de Malval), whose Villa Isabelle was Spindle's headquarters for several months. Raoul's mission was only to act as liaison officer with the Carte organisation and in *SOE in France* M. R. D. Foot noted: 'This may in part explain what so much annoyed his colleagues on the Riviera, why he did no actual sabotage work at all'.

Arnaud joined Spindle as wireless operator in the summer of 1942. *Left:* **Raoul (left) and Arnaud (right) as they appear in** ***Odette*****.** *Right:* **By then Peter Churchill was using the name 'Pierre Marc Chauvet' as a false identity. (IWM)**

Left: **At the outset, although Wilcox, both the director and producer of *Odette,* had decided to shoot his movie in France on the locations where the real action had taken place, he and his team also had to be mindful of one of the golden rules of the movie trade: the shot must look impressive on the screen. This must have been the reason for filming this sequence of Arnaud going down a flight of steps with his bicycle in front of the Notre Dame de l'Espérance church at Cannes.** *Right:* **Located at the top of the Suquet, the beautiful old city built on a rocky promontory, these stairs merely lead to a narrow vantage point built on an old fortification, a place where nobody would ever risk taking a bicycle — even in peace-time!**

However, in spite of SOE's support to Carte during 1942, by the autumn he and Michel/Raoul had little, if anything, to show for all the effort. They had organised only one arms drop and they had mismanaged a proposed Hudson pick-up in circumstances that reflected little credit on either of them. They had collected several tons of arms brought in from fishing boats but they had not even managed to store the weapons properly. And things were to become even more difficult in November for, following the Allied landings in North Africa, the Germans decided to occupy the hitherto 'Free Zone' of France (see *After the Battle* No. 76). The operation proceeded like clockwork and by November 12 German and Italian troops were holding the whole of the Mediterranean coast of France.

By now the Carte organisation was actually breaking up. Endless discussions and lack of action from Carte himself led to one of his lieutenants, Louba (Henri J. Frager), and a party of 'activists' rising against him. The final split came at the beginning of January 1943 when several of Carte's lieutenants decided to break away and form a separate and more active organisation. They seemingly promised to be able of conducting actual operations and eventually Raoul sided with them, a move subsequently approved by F Section.

Throughout the latter part of 1942, the Spindle circuit had its headquarters in the Villa Isabelle, a luxurious mansion rented by Antoine de Malval at the western entrance to Cannes. Sadly, this magnificent — and historic — building was demolished many years ago to be replaced by the modern Palais Isabelle *(above)* **which now occupies the site at 64 Avenue du Docteur Picaud.**

Left: **In the same sequence as that illustrated at the top of this page, we see Arnaud apprehended by a French control post guard (surprisingly dressed in civilian attire) whereupon he is asked to show his identity card. This is another scene filmed at a location where no real action occured as it would have been pointless to set up a check-point right at the very top of the Suquet.** *Right:* **It was filmed on Rue de la Castre, just a few metres away from the spot where the other shot was taken.**

Another scene shows a group, among them Arnaud, running away from a surprise raid by German police *(bottom)*.

The scene was also shot at the Suquet — from the top of a street which now bears the name of a hero of the Resistance: Louis Perrissol. The stairway from where the group arrived, the Traverse de la Tour, was used again later in another sequence (see page 25) but by then, it was supposed to depict a street in Marseille!

When he was interrogated in 1945, Hugo Bleicher said that he originally went to the Riviera in the summer of 1942 as part of 'an expedition to track down wireless posts'. He said that his party 'consisted mostly of SD men but there were also some members of the Abwehr'. Located at the beginning of Quai Saint-Pierre, the Bistro du Port is today a pizzeria.

Left: **Lise (Odette Sansom), the third member of the Spindle trio, was put ashore by a small fishing boat near Cassis, 20 kilometres east of Marseille, on the night of October 31/November 1, 1942. The Spindle circuit took care of her after landing and she was sent to Cannes by train.** *Right:* **The film shows Raoul waiting for her at the railway station. The password was 'Pardon Monsieur, Monsieur Chauvet?' Wearing a beret and a fur-collared Canadienne, both supposedly typical French attire, Raoul looks poorly dressed. This choice of clothing by the *Odette* production team upset Mr and Mme Cottet as they had met the real Peter Churchill in 1943 and they recall how he was always smartly turned out. They remained close friends until his death in 1972 and, even today, they regret the fact that he was portrayed so casually dressed.**

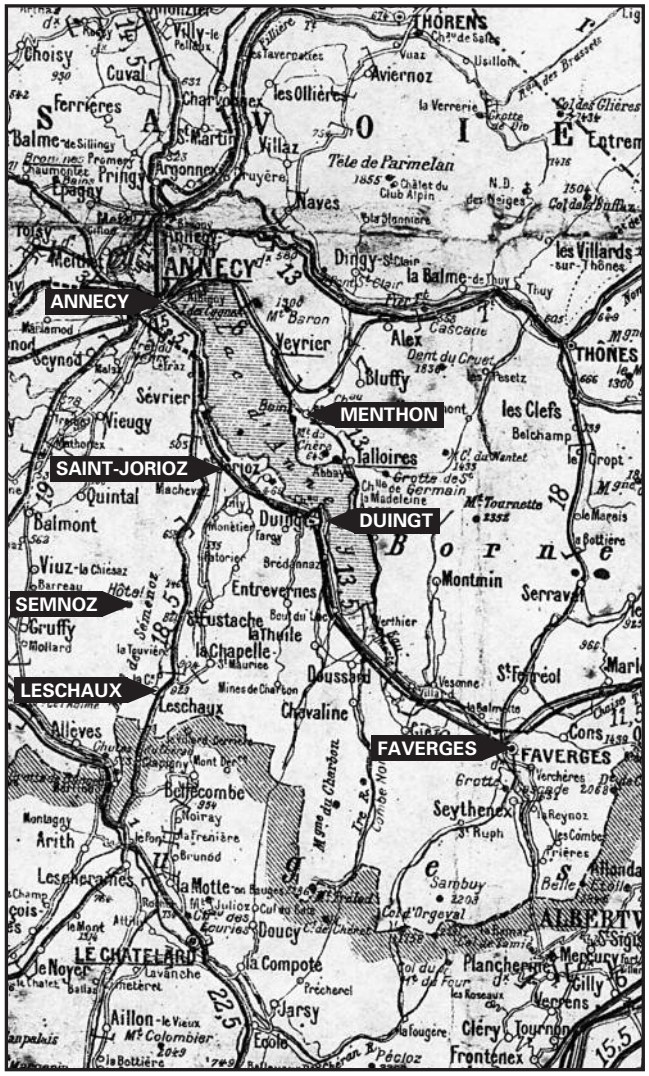
Each SOE agent had up to four names. Apart from his or her real name — Peter Churchill, Odette Sansom, Adolphe Rabinovitch — there was their code-name to be used in communications with SOE in Britain: Churchill's was Spindle, Sansom's was Clothier and Rabinovitch's was Catalpha. Then there was the agent's false identity for ID cards (Pierre Chauvet, Odette Metayer, André Renault) and finally the agent's name in the field to be used in contacts with the Resistance (Raoul, Lise and Arnaud). *Left:* **On their way to the safe house prepared for her, Raoul took Lise down to the harbour and then along the Quai Saint-Pierre.** *Right:* **The contrast today with luxurious yachts moored in the harbour. Off to the right, on the other side of the harbour, stands the Palais des Festivals where the famous Cannes Film Festival is held each year in May.**

When Anna Neagle first read the manuscript of *Odette* written by Jerrard Tickell she declared that she felt that she could never play the part. Later, when they were working on *Maytime in Mayfair* she recalled how her husband Herbert came on the set and said: 'I've got Odette coming down with her husband Peter Churchill'. She had decided that she wanted Herbert to make it and she said to me: "I would very much like you to do this".' *Left:* **Here, Raoul sends Lise to No. 21 where she is to 'ring the top bell twice and ask for Catherine'.** *Right:* **The former film set today: Rue du Port leading to the Suquet.**

The SOE landings by boats on the Riviera had to cease with the arrival of Axis forces on the coast so in February 1943 Raoul moved his base inland to the département of Haute-Savoie. He went there to work with End (André Marsac), one of Carte's ex-lieutenants who had moved to Saint-Jorioz, a small village on the Lac d'Annecy. There, under the name of Philippe Muriel, End had settled with his wife and some of his group in Les Tilleuls, a large house near the small railway station.

Raoul and Lise followed some time later and Mme Marsac, End's wife, met them at Annecy station from where they took the bus to Saint-Jorioz. End took them to the Hôtel de la Poste, run by the Cottet family, which lay about 300 metres away from Les Tilleuls. There Raoul and Lise were registered as husband and wife under the names of Pierre and Odette Chambrun (from March 27 as noted in a French police report of May 9, 1943). As to Arnaud, the team's wireless operator, he had travelled under his own steam with Riquet, another member of End's group, bringing with him two radio sets. On arrival, he had been taken to a safe house near Faverges, a small town 17 kilometres to the south-east, and daily meetings were arranged with either Raoul or Lise at different places along the side of the lake between Duingt and Doussard, places that each of them could reach in less than an hour by bicycle.

When the Carte organisation broke up in January 1943, André Marsac (SOE code-name End), one of the organisation's ex-lieutenants, moved inland to Saint-Jorioz in the département of Haute-Savoie. He settled his group in Les Tilleuls, a house near the railway station. The railway line and the station (behind the hotel) have disappeared but Les Tilleuls still stands, now a combined hotel and restaurant.



Lake Annecy and Saint-Jorioz where End settled with his group in February 1943, soon followed by Raoul and Lise. Their radio operator, Arnaud, was given a safe house at Faverges, 17 kilometres to the south-east, so meetings were arranged at places along the shore near Duingt.

Having met up with End, Raoul and Lise moved to Haute-Savoie in February 1943. They went by train to Annecy and from there took the bus to Saint-Jorioz. *Above:* Their arrival at the Hôtel de la Poste was re-enacted in 1950 for *Odette*, one of the scenes shot at an authentic location.

The Hôtel de la Poste closed down some years ago but the exterior remains the same though it has now been converted into separate shops on the ground floor with apartments above. The road beyond the bridge over the small Laudon river leads to Annecy.

Just as the real Raoul and Lise had done in 1943, Trevor Howard and Anna Neagle enter the bar of the Hôtel de la Poste which then still looked exactly the same as it had seven years before.

The same hallway is now occupied by 4807 Immobilier, an estate agency, who kindly agreed to let Jean Paul take the comparisons.

Not only did Herbert Wilcox use the same historic location but he also used two genuine players from the real story: Jean and Simone Cottet, the proprietors of the Hôtel de la Poste in 1943. In this still, Raoul's contact Jacques (possibly portraying the real Jacques Latour) on the right introduces the two newcomers to Jean Cottet (behind the bar) in a sequence which is wholly in French: 'Bonjour Monsieur . . . Enchanté Madame', and we hear the genuine voices of Jean and Simone.

It quickly became apparent that the group was not security-minded. One member, Jacques Latour, later told SOE how he 'avoided as much as possible going near the Saint-Jorioz group because he did not care about the way they lived. They all lived together in one villa . . . There were constant quarrels between Lise and Arnaud who had an impossible character.'

In his debrief given to SOE interrogators in October 1943, Arnaud himself reported that 'End was apt to be boastful' and that 'Chaillan (Roger Bardet, End's deputy) made a practice of carrying a suitcase around with them which contained all manner of incriminating documents, such as photographs and blank identity cards', and that 'Lise had the unfortunate habit of keeping papers unnecessarily'. Mr and Mrs Cottet recall how those of the Marsac group called for a taxi to go here or there, a somewhat conspicuous way to move about in that part of the country. Also, Lise did not keep a low enough profile and, as noted by the French police report of May 1943, she had attracted attention as doing a lot of travelling in the region.

The Spindle group now started to work with the Faure Organisation (Jean Valette d'Osia and the Armée Secrète, see *After the Battle* No. 105). Originally a contact of Carte, Faure had been contacted by Raoul through End. Most of Faure's original organisation were officers and men of the 27ème BCA (Bataillon de Chasseurs Alpins) but at this time there were large numbers of young men fleeing to the Maquis as they wanted to avoid compulsory labour in Germany and Faure's organisation was helping them with food, instructions and arms.

Simone Cottet is seen offering Raoul and Lise something to eat which they accept with appreciation.

Unfortunately a wall has since been built about a metre in front of where the bar once stood, dividing the room in two.

Left: **Meanwhile, Arnaud and his radio set had been taken to the safe house near Faverges (see map page 8).** *Right:* **Jean Paul discovered that although Wilcox had used the correct town, this scene of Lise arriving had been filmed on Place Gambetta looking the wrong way. The road into Faverges from Saint-Jorioz comes in from the west but this is the road coming in from the north. Wilcox must have chosen this setting because it looked better with the mountains in the background.**

In his book *Duel of Wits* published after the war Raoul explained that he had personally sent an urgent message to London at the beginning of March 1943 to ask for an air drop of weapons to '2,000 determined, well officered maquisards stationed around Annecy'. However, the precise part that the Spindle team really played in arranging the dropping of supplies to Haute-Savoie in March 1943 remains unclear for the daily summary of operations of No. 138 Squadron indicates that the operations at that time were destined for the Director circuit. This had been formed by Mesnard (Jean Meunier), another of Carte's ex-lieutenants who had sided with the activists when the Carte organisation disintegrated. Director had a sub-circuit in Haute-Savoie from where messages could be easily passed to and from London via Switzerland. None of the members of Director were London-trained agents — somewhat unique for circuits supported by F Section — but SOE thought well enough of its possibilities to send them supplies.

In March 1943 there were two drops. The first, code-named 'Director 34', despatched six Halifaxes on the night of March 14/15 but it had to be aborted as no reception lights were seen at planned dropping point 10F/4 in the north of the département. More success was achieved with 'Director 35' on the night of March 20/21 when three of the four Halifaxes despatched by No. 138 Squadron spotted the bonfires at two dropping points near Annecy and released 45 containers and 30

However, Arnaud was not based in the actual town itself but in the house of Joseph-Henri Guillot, the forest guard at Les Tissots, a hamlet in the mountains seven kilometres to the south of Faverges. It was perfect from a security point of view for no one could reach the place without being heard or seen while still a long way off. (Yves Godard)

Going to visit Arnaud at his own place as seen in the film would have been a bad break in security. The real Raoul, Lise and Arnaud would instead meet at various locations along the lake.

Left: **This shot is from the same sequence as the one at the top of this page, the camera having traversed 180 degrees to follow the arrival of Lise.** *Right:* **Place Gambetta, looking south.**

packages. Another operation, 'Director 36' with just two aircraft, was scheduled for the beginning of April. The Director circuit was eliminated early in 1944 so most of its achievements are unrecorded.

At the beginning of March, at a rendezvous in the reeds just past the end of Lake Annecy, Arnaud handed Raoul two messages from London. The first gave him instructions to return to England to report to SOE, stating that a Lysander would be sent to pick him up from a field near Tournus in the Saône valley, 90 kilometres north of Lyon. He was to get in position by March 14. The second message announced that the same aircraft would bring in Roger (Francis C. A. Cammaerts) who was to replace him in his absence. This enraged Arnaud who saw the arrival of Roger as a lack of confidence in him, and Raoul had a job in getting Arnaud to calm down.

Raoul quickly reached Tournus but the promised aircraft never arrived and he spent the whole week hiding in the nearby village of Préty. It was not until March 20 that a courier finally brought a message from Arnaud to say that the aircraft had been rescheduled to pick him up from a field near Compiègne, north of Paris, and that he must be ready waiting on the evening of March 23. He was quickly driven by car to Chalon-sur-Saône from where he took a train to Paris with Riquet and two others.

Together with Louba, who had also been instructed to report to London, they reached the landing field in good time. The Lysander, V9673 MA-J piloted by Squadron Leader Hugh Verity, touched down about 2 a.m. and Roger and Alain (Emile Duboudin) quickly alighted with their luggage. Raoul shook hands with them before he and Louba climbed aboard for the return flight to Tangmere in Sussex.

Meanwhile, Roger was taken to a safe house in Paris where he was to await contact with End. However, on his second morning there (March 25), he learned that End had been arrested (see below) so he decided to make his way to Annecy by train. There he succeeded to meet Arnaud who made it abundantly clear that he was against working with this newcomer, and he bluntly told Roger that he 'looked much too English and had a pronounced accent when speaking French'. Arnaud insisted that Roger go to a safe house in Cannes whilst he built up his cover as a schoolmaster teaching in a school in Paris and who had come down south to recover after an attack of jaundice. Eventually Roger went on to organise a new circuit called Jockey in south-eastern France.

Raoul, Lise and Arnaud used to travel by bicycle to their rendezvous along the side of the lake between Saint-Jorioz and Faverges and this scene from the film perfectly mirrors this scenario.

The scene was shot at the end of the Rue du Port in Saint-Jorioz. As this lane goes nowhere this is another case of a location being chosen primarily for its magnificent background. The real road to Faverges is a kilometre away.

The part played by the Spindle team in arranging the dropping of arms to the Resistance in Haute-Savoie in 1943 remains unclear for the three Halifaxes despatched by No. 138 Squadron on the night of March 20/21 to drop 45 containers and 30 packages at two points near Annecy were destined instead for the Director circuit. Another of the original wartime personalities who appears in *Odette* is Milleau (Jean Carquex), the commander of the Armée Secrète contingent in Faverges, who had arranged the safe house for Arnaud at Les Tissots in 1943.

Disturbing events had since taken place in Paris. In mid-March, End had gone to Paris with his secretary Lucienne to take back to Saint-Jorioz 'some new crystals and a wireless plan which was to be brought over by Roger on the plane which was to take Raoul out'. The Abwehr (German Army counter-espionage service) had received a tip-off that an important resistance chief had just arrived from the free zone. One of their agents, an Irishwoman named Hélène, arranged a rendezvous and End and Lucienne were arrested at a café on the Champs-Elysées on the afternoon of March 21.

End was taken to the prison at Fresnes where he was questioned by an Abwehr agent, Hugo Ernst Bleicher. According to Bleicher, after a mild interrogation with no violence lasting two or three days, End proposed a deal to buy his freedom. Offering the German one million francs, End told Bleicher that if he chose to disappear after receiving the money, he (End) could arrange to get him by air to England. Bleicher said that he would agree to the deal so End disclosed that the money was hidden in a drawer in the room in the hotel where he had stayed the night before his arrest (Hôtel Bergerac, room No. 13). Bleicher recovered the cash and four crystals for radio transmitters at the hotel and an hour later he showed them to his boss, Oberstleutnant Oscar Reile.

Bleicher continued to hoodwink End, discussing details almost every day, and by the end of March, End agreed to write two letters, one to his wife, the other to his second-in-command, Chaillan (Roger Bardet), at Saint-Jorioz. Bleicher took the night train to Annecy to deliver the letters personally. He took the bus from the railway station at Annecy, alighted at Saint-Jorioz, and went straight to Les Tilleuls where he met Mme Marsac (i.e. End's wife) and Chaillan. Claiming to be a 'Colonel Henri' of the Luftwaffe, a German pre-war friend of End, he handed over End's letter. Chaillan agreed to go to Paris to meet End and Mme Marsac said she would come too. Bleicher agreed and a rendezvous was arranged in Paris, at her apartment near the Porte d'Orléans, at 2 p.m. on the following afternoon.

It was midday and Bleicher went for lunch at the Hôtel de la Poste. 'There was one big circle of people sitting at one table, in lively discussion. There were two women among them. I had hardly entered the restaurant when the talk at the other table dried up. All stared suspiciously across at me.' He had hardly finished his 'excellent' lunch when the cook came over to the table and introduced himself as Louis. He was one of Chaillan's men and, obviously convinced that this man who had come from Les Tilleuls was another member of the circuit, he started to talk to him. Before Bleicher could reply, one of the women at the next table intervened harshly: 'Don't you know that you are not to talk to the guests?' Surprised by such 'high manner of talking to people', he asked who she was and Louis muttered: 'Oh that is Lise, the Englishwoman, who came over from London with our new wireless operator. She is in charge here now and interferes all the time.' Feeling that it was 'high time' for him to disappear, Bleicher left the Hôtel de la Poste.

Bleicher returned to Paris that evening on the night express. Chaillan and Mme Marsac were in the same train but they travelled separately, Bleicher having pointed out that it was better if they were not seen together.

Chaillan had shown End's letters to Lise in the afternoon, before taking the train to Paris, and the next day, at the daily meeting with Arnaud halfway between Faverges and Duingt, she talked about them. 'She was very upset', Arnaud recalled later. 'It appeared that End had met a friend in the prison in the person of the Alsatian Colonel Henri (Bleicher) who was helping him to escape.'

This Lysander IIIA, V9673 (MA-J) of No. 161 Squadron piloted by Squadron Leader Hugh Verity, was the one which successfully collected Raoul from a landing field near Compiègne, north of Paris, on the night of March 23/24, 1943. It was lost on a similar pick-up operation on December 10 that year when it crashed north of Laon when on Operation 'Sten' to recover an agent. The pilot on that mission, Flying Officer James Robertson Grant Bathgate, RNZAF, was killed.

Bleicher arrived at the rendezvous at Mme Marsac's apartment punctually next afternoon and he took Chaillan to Fresnes. On the pretext of confronting End with this witness, he got Chaillan to End's cell. End was obviously surprised that Bleicher had done what he had said and Bleicher later commented how 'I had to continue to abuse his unlimited confidence in me'. They discussed the plan of End's escape from Fresnes in the minutest detail and it was agreed that Chaillan was to go back to Saint-Jorioz and have a message sent to London to ask for a pick-up aircraft. The final arrangement was that End, Bleicher and Suzanne Laurent (Bleicher's mistress) would leave France together.

Bleicher then decided that it was time to 'turn the screw a little tighter' and he started to argue as to which guaranties he would have that nothing bad would happen to him in England. He finally persuaded End that he would consider as a guarantee a list of agents of End's organisation, a list that his best friend in Paris 'would keep as surety that nothing happens to me in London'. End could not bring himself to agree but Bleicher cleverly played the game until End finally agreed to write down a list of 20 names and addresses 'in Bordeaux, Marseille, Strasbourg, Nancy and elsewhere'. In the days that followed, while Bleicher visited him almost every day, End became more loquacious

On March 23/24, the same aircraft also brought in Roger (Francis C. A. Cammaerts) who was to replace Raoul in his absence. This still from *Odette* shows the real Major Buckmaster (right) detailing his mission to Roger before take-off. However Arnaud viewed Roger's arrival as demonstrating a lack of confidence in himself and, when the new arrival came to see Arnaud in Haute-Savoie, the latter made it clear that he was dead against working with him. Instead Arnaud insisted that Roger be sent immediately to a safe house in Cannes.

Left: **Born on August 9, 1899 at Tettnang on Lake Konstanz on the German-Swiss border, Hugo Ernst Bleicher served in the Pioneer Gas Corps during the First World War. In 1940, he was assigned to the Geheime Feldpolizei, the Wehrmacht field security police, and was employed first in the Netherlands and later in France. In October 1941, after he had assisted in the arrest of a Resistance worker, he secured a transfer to the Abwehr (military counter-intelligence).** *Right:* **Marius Goring who plays Bleicher in the film bore an extraordinary likeness to the real man!**

Bleicher personally delivered End's letters for Chaillan and Mme Marsac to Saint-Jorioz. His mission completed, Bleicher goes for lunch at the restaurant in the Hôtel de la Poste.

The ground floor of the former hotel has been extensivly modified with a new entrance, passage and staircase, installed to service the first-floor apartments.

From the end of October 1941, Feldwebel Bleicher was assigned to Abteilung III-F of the Abwehr in Paris. His clever tactics and soft approach soon produced a long string of arrests and the successful infiltration of Resistance networks and SOE circuits. When he arrived in Saint-Jorioz, he was in the guise of a Colonel Henri of the Luftwaffe, allegedly a pre-war friend of End. (Yet later Bleicher said that he knew no actual Colonel Henri and that he had never known End before his arrest). He said that it was only by chance that he spotted Lise at the Hôtel de la Poste, where he was having an 'excellent' midday lunch, when his attention was attracted by her 'high manners of talking to people'. Popular accounts written after the war describe Colonel Henri approaching Lise at the restaurant; introducing himself as a German officer; offering her letters of introduction written by End, and outlining his pick-up plan to her. However, neither Arnaud, when he reported in 1943, nor Bleicher when he was interrogated in 1945, mention such a conversation as having taken place and this sequence *(left)* **appears to be a complete fabrication.**

Above: **On April 10, Arnaud prepared a drop-zone on the top of the Semnoz mountain for the return by parachute of Raoul. The movie shows him and Lise preparing the signal bonfire.** *Below:* **Only after a long search did Jean Paul establish exactly where this scene had been filmed: at Plainpalais, 40 kilometres away! The altitude is 1150 metres and the view is south, with the 1300-metre summit of Montgelas in mid-distance and the Belledone mountain range in the background.**

Though Arnaud mentioned nothing in his 1943 report as to who was, or was not, with him, in the book *Odette,* published by Chapman and Hall in 1949, on which the movie is based, Jerrard Tickell says that Lise was with him: 'It took them over two hours to get to the top and they stood at last on the summit, breathing deeply and looking around them. "We'd better get some branches now and make ready." Between them, they hacked off enough wood to make a big bonfire and laid it in a heap. Dusk was beginning to shadow the valley far below before the job was done.'

and talked of Peter Churchill who had already spent some time with them at Saint-Jorioz as a member of the organisation but was now in Britain and who was in fact a relative of Prime Minister Winston Churchill (which was not true).

Chaillan returned to Saint-Jorioz on April 4 with a new message from End insisting that Bleicher 'was really anti-Nazi and he wanted to come to England to discuss terms for a separate peace'. Arnaud then sent to London a message asking for a pick-up flight to England for End and Bleicher. Major Maurice Buckmaster, the commander of F Section, called in Raoul to show him the amazing message. Could it possibly be genuine? Both were so alarmed to discover that End had given Lise's address to this German that an answer was urgently despatched to Arnaud stating that the whole scheme had to be dropped, including the escape of End, and that he and Lise must leave immediately.

In the meantime, Chaillan and Riquet still attempted to persuade Arnaud to go along with the plan. Arnaud tried to prevent them from going back to Paris but they said they could not let End down. When they insisted on going through with the plan, Arnaud 'lost his temper and threatened to shoot them if they did not get out'. In the end, Chaillan and Riquet returned to Paris on April 10. Even if there was to be no pick-up, they said they would take the Colonel and End to the landing ground and liquidate the German when they got there.

Meanwhile, arrangements were being made in London for the return of Raoul to France by parachute. He had of course received the order to keep clear of Bleicher but Major Buckmaster had also instructed him to avoid Lise as well, at least until she had broken with the German. The operation, code-named 'Spindle A', was initiated on April 6 and it was to be combined with the delivery of stores. As there existed the risk that Bleicher might have got wind of Raoul's impending arrival from End, Arnaud was asked to change the drop point from the agreed one near Tournus.

On April 10, Arnaud reconnoitred a new drop-zone just above Saint-Jorioz on the top of the Semnoz mountain (1700 metres high) where the mountain's round top provided a flat piece of ground some 100 metres by 100. As the terrain at the sides was not too steep, a deviation in either direction would still mean a soft landing. In order to prepare a large signal bonfire, Arnaud cut branches from nearby fir trees and piled them in a disused chalet nearby to keep them dry.

Having returned to the valley late that evening, Arnaud radioed the message confirming the new landing place to Britain in the early hours of April 11. The following day Tempsford was notified of the amendment which said that the dropping point for 'Spindle A' was to be changed from 7F/92L to 10F/14. The code message to be broadcast by the BBC to announce that the operation was on would be 'Le carabe d'or fait sa toilette de printemps'. That evening Arnaud cycled to Saint-Jorioz to tell Lise about the signal message.

It appears that she informed her contacts in the Resistance on March 13 as a car was prepared at Saint-Jorioz to take the reception committee to Leschaux, half-way up the Semnoz. This vehicle powered by charcoal gas had been provided by Marcel Fournier (see 'Operation Pimento' in *After the Battle* No. 26) who also provided the driver. However, Lise did not tell her contacts that supplies would also be arriving so the Resistance did not send a single man to collect the containers. Did she simply ignore the fact that supplies were going to be dropped? Was she suspicious of the Resistance? Did she want to make sure Raoul was safe first, and deal with the materials later when he was safely away?

The message announcing the operation was broadcast by the BBC in the evening of April 14. As soon as Lise and Jean and Simone Cottet, the hotel proprietors, heard the message, the three of them started off in the car about 8.30 p.m. in company with the driver. The driver started off in the direction of Annecy and at Sévrier turned left to take the road leading up to Leschaux. The road was steep and the underpowered engine had increasing difficulty climbing the hill. It finally gave up the ghost at La Touvière, one kilometre short of Leschaux.

From here they proceeded on foot and, on reaching Leschaux, took the stony path which led to the top of the mountain. They were late and they climbed as quickly as they could, gasping for breath. Snow covering the higher ground made it even more difficult, particularly for Simone Cottet who was only wearing a skirt and normal shoes. She had loaned her winter trousers and shoes to Lise and so had awful problems walking in the thick snow.

Jean and Simone Cottet are positive that Arnaud was not with them in the car or on the subsequent climb to the Semnoz yet Arnaud said in October 1943 that he was up the Semnoz mountain to 'receive' Raoul in company with 'Lise and M. and Mme. Cottet'. To reconcile these statements, it is possible that Arnaud climbed up separately and that he joined the other three at the top. The events which then took place were so tense that the Cottets might just have failed to notice Arnaud's presence.

The message announcing the return of Raoul was broadcast by the BBC at 7.30 p.m. on April 14. Lise was at Saint-Jorioz, at the Hôtel de la Poste, in company with Jean and Simone Cottet when she heard it and not with Arnaud as depicted in *Odette*. At the time he was at his house at Les Tissots, 20 kilometres away.

Left: **This is the road used by Lise, Jean and Simone to meet Raoul. However, about a kilometre short of Leschaux the charcoal gas engine of their car gave up the ghost.** *Right:* **Abandoning the car, the three had to continue on foot. On reaching Leschaux by the track in the foreground, they took the stony path which led to the top of the mountain. A road has since been constructed up the Semnoz, the zig-zag scar denotes its route to the top. The return of Raoul to France was initially scheduled to be carried out any time after April 6, and was to be combined with any stores operation. The DZ chosen was near the Saône river, between Tournus and Pont-de-Vaux, and was code-named 7F/92L, its coordinates being 46°29'15'' North, 04°55'46'' East. However, owing to the possibility that Bleicher might have heard about Raoul's impending arrival from Chaillan or End, a new location was chosen near Annecy. On April 12, an amendment to Operation 'Spindle A' changed the dropping point to 10F/14 (coordinates 45°47'50'' North, 06°06'14'' East) — the top of the Semnoz mountain. The signal letter 'F for Freddy' remained the same. The Halifax V, DG406 (MA-V) of No. 161 Squadron, took off from Tempsford at 9.10 p.m. on April 14 piloted by Flying Officer Leggate. The navigators were Flight Lieutenant Livry and Sergeant George; the wireless operator Flying Officer Fewkes; the flight engineer Sergeant Anderson; the rear gunner Flying Officer Maguire and the despatcher Sergeant Betts. The personnel and equipment listed were one man ('Spindle A', i.e. Peter Churchill), seven containers and six packages divided between 'Perch 7' and 'Spindle A'. In addition there were three 'nickels' (packages of leaflets to be scattered) and ten pigeons. The Halifax crossed the coast over Tangmere at 9.53 p.m. and made landfall at Cabourg at 10.29 p.m. Leaflets were dropped over Cambremer from where the flight continued towards the Loire valley and Macon. Reaching the 'Perch 7' target area (46°07'13'' North, 05°15'37'' East) near La Tranclière, in a landscape dotted with small lakes ten kilometres south of Bourg-en-Bresse, the target was difficult to find. Also, because of the woods surrounding the drop-zone, identification lights on the ground could only be seen when the aircraft was directly overhead. In spite of the difficulties, the DZ was identified and the signal letter 'P' was seen flashing. The aircraft was over the target area from 0.30 a.m. to 0.31 a.m. and the supplies — five containers and two packages — were successfully dropped from a height of 600 feet. They continued south-eastwards, map-reading the route to Annecy which they found all lit up. The 'Spindle A' pinpoint on the Semnoz was a few kilometres to the south. The crew reported that the reception lights were good, and that a bonfire has been lit which proved helpful. The correct signal letter was seen flashing so the load of one man, two containers and four packages was reported as being released from a height of 800 feet on a course at 120°. The aircraft was over the target area from 0.50 a.m. to 0.53 a.m. The return flight followed the same route via Macon, where more leaflets were dropped at 1.40 a.m., and the Loire valley. Cabourg was passed at 2.54 a.m. and they crossed the English coast at Tangmere at 3.29 a.m., landing back at Tempsford at 4.10 a.m.**

To re-enact a real air drop on the real Semnoz, and having the agent land at the right place close to the cross purporting to indicate the summit of the mountain, would have been too complicated so the film shows Raoul in the aircraft, getting ready to jump though the hole in the fuselage *(left)*, **and then struggling on the ground with his parachute after he had 'landed'** *(right)*. **Still to this day, M. and Mme Cottet regret that Wilcox failed to include the extraordinary sight of Peter Churchill floating down on parachute singing the *Marseillaise*. Perhaps he was concerned that cinema audiences would have never believed it!**

Finally they reached the top and rushed the last hundred metres to the chalet where the branches had been stored. It was now after midnight and they were in a panic to get the signal fire ready before the aircraft arrived. They ran back and forth with armfuls of branches which were piled in the centre of the landing field. No sooner had they finished than the sound came of an aircraft approaching in the distance. A bottle of petrol was quickly poured over the branches and the fire was soon burning brightly.

At 0.50 a.m. on April 15 the aircraft — Halifax DG406 MA-V of No. 161 Squadron — passed overhead and began a slow turn to port. It returned flying across the length of the mountain top at which point Raoul jumped. As he floated down they could hear him singing the *Marseillaise* and he landed in the snow just ten metres from those waiting on the ground. After making another pass to drop the two containers and four packages, the Halifax departed. It had been a perfect mission and the aircraft had only been over the target for three minutes.

The small party dragged the containers and packages towards a building off to the side of the landing ground. It was a hotel closed for the winter but by breaking a window they piled the supplies inside. Arnaud stayed behind to guard them for the night.

On the top of the Semnoz, looking south, this is the real wartime drop field as it appears today. This is angled north-south and the Halifax flew across it from right to left. The post-war accounts describe the summit as a narrow hog's back but this picture proves that it is actually quite large, the level area being over 300 metres wide. The hotel in which they hid the containers can be seen on the left.

As has been explained, the locations for the summit scene showing Lise greeting Raoul *(left)* **were not filmed on the Semnoz, but at Plainpalais. Symbolic crosses often mark the top of French mountains so the film crew erected one at Plainpalais to make it look convincing.** *Right:* **A deserted place in 1943, the Semnoz is today a popular winter sports resort and a ski track now crosses the field where Peter Churchill landed by parachute on a moonlit night 60 years ago.**

Left: **Raoul, Lise, Jean and Simone Cottet used logging tracks to return down the mountain but it still took four hours before they reached Saint-Jorioz about 5.30 a.m. This still from *Odette* does not purport to show their return (Arnaud was not with them) but it is relevant at this point in the story because it shows the road which they took to reach the hotel.** *Right:* **In the background, the Saint-Jorioz church and the Semnoz mountain.**

On orders from Faure (Jean Valette d'Osia), the Armée Secrète kept station throughout the year in an ex-army chalet on the top of the Semnoz. These two pictures were provided to us by Georges Buchet, a member of the four-man team which was there on April 15, 1943 when they received a phone call from Leschaux telling them about an air drop on the Semnoz the previous night. They had heard the noise of an aircraft during the night but had not thought anything of it as it was a common occurrence when Bomber Command flew over France to attack targets in Italy.

Left: **Georges Buchet took Jean Paul back to the same wartime chalet. The round summit in the background is the top of the Semnoz mountain, 1700 metres high. Marching on skis, Georges and his comrades cautiously approached the shut-up hotel, two advancing to the left of the building and two to the right, whistling the *Marseillaise* as a signal of recognition.** *Right:* **At the rear of the hotel, Georges points out the first-floor window where Arnaud appeared.**

The second evening after they arrived back at the hotel, Mme Cottet knocked on Raoul and Lise's room and told Lise there was 'a strange man' downstairs who claimed that Henri was a traitor, but when she came down she found Bleicher and some armed men waiting for her. For some reason the stairs in the real hotel (see opposite page) were not used to film this scene. Possibly Wilcox thought that the actual staircase was too short to make Lise's descent appear dramatic.

Raoul and Lise with Jean and Simone Cottet then started down the mountain, taking the direct trails used in the summer to pull felled trees down to the valley, reaching the hotel before dawn and before anyone was about.

Arnaud said that he heard afterwards from the Cottets that 'Raoul had wanted to move immediately after he had taken breakfast to Les Glailleuls hotel in Menthon, on the opposite side of the lake' but that 'Lise had said there was no immediate danger'.

On the morning of the 15th Lise went to Annecy to see Lieutenant Tom Morel of the Armée Secrète (see *After the Battle* No. 105) 'to get his men to collect the stuff'. A messenger was sent to Leschaux to contact a four-man team who were hiding out in an ex-army chalet on the top of the Semnoz (there was a wire between the post office at Leschaux and the chalet). Marching on skis, they went to the shut-up mountain-top hotel, two advancing to the left of the building and two to the right, all whistling the *Marseillaise* as a signal of recognition. A window at the first floor finally opened and a man appeared. It was Arnaud.

He was suspicious and it took some minutes to establish contact and they took him to their chalet to recomfort him (he was cold). Loaded down with as much as they could carry — radio sets — the four men took Arnaud to Leschaux where the material was stored for another party to take it further down by lorry. There, Arnaud decided to continue alone and, having asked the way down to Duingt, he parted carrying his suitcase. That evening the four men returned to the top and did their best to hide the rest of the supplies some distance from the hotel.

Although the eventual fate of these containers is not known, they might have been quickly recovered by other teams of the Armée Secrète but it is also possible that they fell into the hands of the Italians who raided the Semnoz about April 20, searching the hotel and the chalets. Also, some had landed outside the target area and at least one package was found in a field at Saint-Eustache, a village at the bottom of the mountain on the same side as Saint-Jorioz. When the villagers opened it they found arms of every sort: revolvers, guns . . . and 6,000 cigarettes! The Gendarmerie was informed but by the time they arrived everything had disappeared. The homes of those families known to support De Gaulle and the Resistance were searched but nothing was ever recovered.

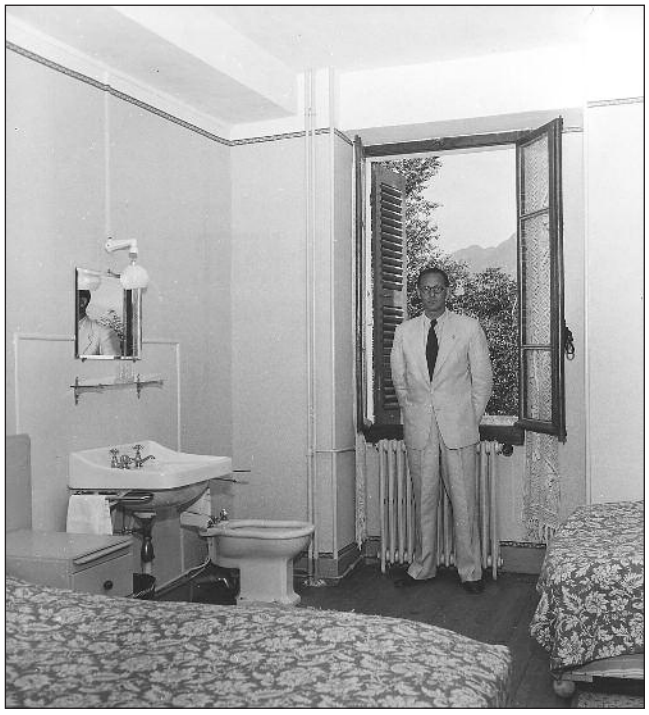
Raoul went back to sleep when Lise went down and he was still in bed when the Germans burst into the room. 'Your other names are Raoul and Captain Churchill and anyway I can hear your English accent', says Colonel Henri. A shot of Raoul and Lise in bed together would have been too much for cinema audiences in 1950 and would have sullied the 'purity' of the liaison; thus the film shows them in separate rooms. In fact Mr and Mrs Cottet confirmed that they both occupied a single room — No. 2 on the first floor.

In Paris, Chaillan and Riquet had failed in their plan to fool Bleicher into releasing End with the promise of a pick-up. They were arrested by the Germans on the evening of April 13 in the flat of Mme Marsac near the Porte d'Orléans where Bleicher had summoned everyone on the pretext of discussing End's escape from Fresnes. According to Chaillan and Mme Marsac, Bleicher was also 'arrested', being very roughly handed in the process, but this could have been merely carried out to maintain his cover. Bleicher would say nothing about this when he was interrogated in 1945 so whether he was genuinely arrested by the Sicherheitsdienst (SD), or if it was all a pretence to try to keep his association with the Resistance, is in the realms of speculation.

It was now high time to strike at the rest of the organisation before the provincial branches received word of what had happened in Paris and Bleicher quickly took a train to Grenoble with Kiki (Jean Lucien Kieffer), one of his French agents, and another agent, a Luxemburger named Léo. He discussed further arrests of members of the group with the Italian authorities and on April 16 proceeded to Annecy in company with a major of the Italian Intelligence Service. There, he learned that the Italians had already searched Les Tilleuls, the house where he had met Chaillan two weeks previously, but had found it empty. He asked if a search had been made at the Hôtel de la Poste (where he had eaten lunch and seen 'Lise' on his first visit to Saint-Jorioz) and when he was told that it had not, 'as a matter of routine' he decided to have a look.

That afternoon, Lise and Raoul cycled to Duingt to meet Arnaud. They told him that the Italian police had been at the Hôtel de la Poste asking for End but Lise said that they had taken no interest in the visitor's book where they were booked in as Mr and Mme Chambrun. It was nevertheless agreed that Raoul and Lise would move to Menthon by bicycle on the 17th.

At 10.30 p.m. that evening, Bleicher went into action. Lise and Raoul were already in their room (No. 2). Bleicher first sent Kiki, in



Peter Churchill revisited M. and Mme Cottet in September 1953 and posed for a 'then and now' picture in his old room which still looked exactly as it did in 1943. The picture was taken by William Kemp who accompanied Peter to illustrate a feature scheduled to appear in the October 10 and 17 issues of *John Bull* magazine.

The first floor of the building has been largely modified and bedroom No. 2 is now part of Sandrine Théry's apartment. She (and her cat!) kindly agreed to let Jean Paul invade her privacy to take this comparison. The window had been enlarged and the room is now smaller, so the comparison was taken with Jean Paul's back against the new wall.

the guise of an emissary from Paris, to knock on the door of the hotel. Jean Cottet later told Arnaud that 'a small pale man wearing a big soft hat with a large brim called at the door saying that he came on behalf of Chaillan and Louba. He also said that the Colonel was a traitor and he must see Lise at once.'

Mme Cottet went upstairs to call for Lise and knocked on room No. 2. Lise immediately got up. 'There is a strange man downstairs who says that Henri is talking in Paris', she told her. Mme Cottet described the man and says that Lise acted as if she recognised him from the description. Mme Cottet went down to be followed some minutes later by Lise. Raoul just went back to sleep and in his 1945 report he agreed that his 'action at this moment was absolutely nil'.

Bleicher and four or five men were waiting at the bottom of the stairs. They announced who they were and asked Lise where her husband was. She said that he was in their room. She was forced upstairs and they burst into the room. Raoul was still in bed and he said later that 'the next thing I knew was that about six men were leaning over me, one of whom asked me what my name was. I told him "Chambrun". He and Henri (Bleicher) both drew revolvers and told me to put up my hands. The former said: "Your other names are Raoul and Captain Churchill and you are nothing more than a saboteur, and anyway I can hear your English accent."

Left: **This picture of the original stairs was also taken by Kemp in September 1953. Unfortunately the staircase was removed when the building was converted and a wall now cuts across just where Peter once walked down.** *Right:* **So, instead of taking a meaningless picture of a blank wall, Jean Paul went round the far side to show where the stairwell penetrated the ceiling.**

Post-war accounts claim that the hotel was surrounded by Italian soldiers *(above left)* **and that Arnaud arrived on bicycle just when Raoul and Lise were led out of the hotel** *(above right)*. **As to the presence of Italian soldiers, neither Arnaud, when he reported in 1943, nor Bleicher when he was interrogated in 1945, mentioned such a deployment. Also, the French police report of the arrest, written a fortnight after it had happened, describes the intervention of only six men in civilian attire and makes no mention of Italian soldiers. Jean and Simone Cottet do not remember having seen any Italian soldiers outside the hotel either — only a handful of men who came in, supposedly German, all dressed in plain clothes and wearing hats (they could not remember clearly today but a single uniformed Italian liaison officer might have accompanied them). As to Arnaud, in his 1943 report he made it clear that he had only learnt of the arrest the day after when he had cycled to the Hôtel de la Poste after Raoul and Lise failed to appear at the rendezvous at Duingt. These two scenes in the film therefore appear to be complete fabrications.**

The former hotel entrance and lobby now houses a photo shop. One wonders how many of its customers today know of the drama that took place on its doorstep that April night 60 years ago.

After the arrest, Bleicher asked Raoul and Lise whether they would prefer to be prisoners of the Germans or the Italians. In the movie, he poses the question through the open window of the police car. Raoul replies, 'The Italians, wouldn't you?' and Bleicher obliges by instructing the driver: 'Annecy barracks!' He was confident that he would soon obtain custody of the two British agents. In actual fact they would be handed over within a fortnight.

We dressed, they put the handcuffs on me, and we were led out.'

The Germans were happy with their prize and Mr and Mme Cottet remember them talking loudly and laughing. Mme Cottet took the opportunity to unburden herself and Bleicher later described her exclaiming that 'We Germans were the greatest barbarians that there had ever been. We were the real Huns'. He did not lose his temper and 'warned the woman to be more careful of what she said'.

Meanwhile, Bleicher's men had searched the room where, according to Arnaud, they found two or three messages and some notes of appointments, including addresses. It is impossible to say how many were arrested following these discoveries, but A. de Malval, the owner of the Spindle safe house in Cannes, later said that Raoul was responsible for his arrest. Raoul agreed that 'perhaps de Malval's name might have been in the notebook'. However, Bleicher's search of the hotel was not very thorough as he did not find the suitcase that Raoul had hidden in the cellar, and he simply instructed Jean Cottet to keep Raoul's formal possessions until collected by the Germans or the Italians.

Bleicher then asked Raoul whether he would prefer to go into German or Italian custody, to which the Britisher replied that Italian arrest was preferable to him. They were taken away to the Italian barracks in Annecy but Bleicher had 'little doubt' that he would get custody of the two agents within a few days.

Arnaud kept his head down at Les Tissots until mid-May when he sent a man to the Hôtel de la Poste to collect Raoul's suitcase. He then left Haute-Savoie and this shot from *Odette* shows him taking leave from his contact at Faverges.

A difficult place to trace for none of the houses visible in the background have survived but Jean Paul was finally shown where the sequence had been filmed: in front of the house of Raymond Favre, himself a former member of the Armée Secrète.

Not knowing what had taken place the previous evening, Arnaud kept the rendezvous at Duingt on the 17th but when Raoul and Lise failed to appear, he cycled to the hotel at Saint-Jorioz. There he learned what had happened so he quickly went into hiding at Les Tissots.

The Resistance now urged the Cottets to leave Saint-Jorioz. Jean started out first by bicycle and went to Frangy, 25 kilometres north-west of Annecy, where he was joined by Simone and their two children who had been brought by car. There they lived in a safe house provided by the Resistance until the heat had died down and it was safe to return to Saint-Jorioz.

Some time later, about mid-May, Arnaud sent a man to the hotel to collect Raoul's hidden suitcase. In it Arnaud found '30 or 40 of his own telegrams . . . 456,000 out of the 500,000 francs which Raoul had brought, his gun, his jumping equipment and other effects'. With nothing to keep him in Haute-Savoie, Arnaud then went to Cannes where he joined forces with Roger (Francis Cammaerts) who was then organising the Jockey circuit but, as was later recalled by Roger, Arnaud 'would not assist (me) in any way'. Arnaud finally made his way over the Pyrénées into Spain and eventually reached England. He returned to France by parachute in March 1944 to start a new circuit, Bargee, but the reception committee was quickly surrounded by the Germans and he was caught. He was to die in Gross-Rosen concentration camp in October 1944.

Though Peter Churchill does not appear in the credits as playing a part in the film, the man from whom Arnaud takes leave at Faverges is in fact him! In this shot he looks vigilantly down the Rue de la Fontaine as Arnaud cycles away to Rue Victor Hugo. Arnaud then made for the Riviera where he reluctantly joined force with Roger before finally making his way back to Britain via Spain.

Pendant la guerre 1939-1945, trois agents des Services Secrets britanniques S.O.E. (Special Operations Executive), en difficulté dans le Midi, se regroupèrent fin 1942 et gagnèrent la Haute-Savoie où la Résistance s'organisait sous l'impulsion de VALLETTE d'OSIA.
Le chef du réseau était Peter CHURCHILL, l'agent de liaison Odette SANSOM et le radio Alec RABINOVITCH, ils fixèrent leur P.C. à Saint-Jorioz. Jean CARQUEX, chef du secteur Armée Secrète de Faverges installa le poste émetteur clandestin et le radio dans la maison forestière de Joseph Henri GUILLOT.
Dès février 1943, la première liaison avec Londres pour le maquis des Glières fut réalisée d'ICI. Dans la nuit du 15/16 avril, au retour d'un voyage à Londres, Peter CHURCHILL fut parachuté sur la montagne enneigée du Semnoz et le soir même arrêté par le Contre Espionnage de l'Armée allemande, ainsi qu'Odette SANSOM. Le radio put gagner la montagne avec l'aide des habitants.
Depuis Londres, BUCKMASTER, chef du SOE-F, lança en septembre l'opération "MARKSMAN" sur l'Ain et la Haute-Savoie et poursuivit l'action du premier réseau, assurant notamment les sabotages et la transmission des messages à l'origine des importants parachutages sur le plateau des Glières. Ils permirent la Libération du département en août 1944, par les seules Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur.
28 septembre 2002
Le Souvenir Français

Arnaud, whose real name was Adolphe Rabinovitch, later returned to France but was arrested and deported to Poland. He was executed in the Gross-Rosen concentration camp in October 1944. Because of his death, the part played by Joseph-Henri Guillot in keeping him safe at Les Tissots was left unrecorded in the SOE files, so no recognition was ever given to Guillot by Britain (an omission which Jean Paul hopes will be redressed one day). However, thanks to the efforts of Yves Godard, this memorial plaque was inaugurated to Guillot's memory at Les Tissots in September 2002. (Y. Godard)

Peter and Odette were first held in the military barracks in Annecy. The same establishment was featured on page 47 of *After the Battle* No. 105, although from the street outside.

The whole barracks have now been razed to the ground. Jean Paul was lucky to take this comparison as the last vestiges were about to disappear.

Peter Churchill and Odette Sansom were first held for five or six days in the military barracks in Annecy before being moved by truck to Grenoble. There they were detained for another week or so and then sent by train to Italy. Arriving in Turin, Odette was put in a cell with the local ladies of easy virtue but the Italian guards treated the couple well. They were then returned to France where they were detained (still under Italian jurisdiction) for a further week in a villa in Nice which had been converted into a prison. Odette was held in an upstairs room and Peter in the cellars. In early May, three weeks after their arrest, the Italians handed them over to the Germans at Toulon.

Two German policemen sent from Paris picked them up and drove them to Marseille. They then took the train to Paris, Peter and Odette being allowed in a same compartment so they could converse as much as they liked. They agreed to pretend to be married and to let the Germans believe that he was the nephew of the British Prime Minister. Peter later recalled how Bleicher once said to him: 'I advise you to say that you are closely related as it may do you some good'.

When they arrived in Paris on May 8, Bleicher was waiting for them at the Gare de Lyon and they were taken to the Fresnes prison where they were separated. They were known as Mr and Mrs Churchill — husband and wife. Although he was interrogated twice, once in May and then again in August, Peter's perceived relationship saved him from being tortured throughout the period of his captivity at Fresnes, whereas Odette was questioned by the Gestapo on 12 different occasions during the seven and a half months that she was at the prison. And on two occasions, she was subjected to torture: 'They seared her back with a red hot iron and when that failed they pulled out all her toe nails' (from the Citation for her George Cross).

The Italians finally handed over Peter and Odette to the Germans and they arrived in Paris on May 8. They were immediately transferred to the Fresnes prison, south of the city, and this clip shows Odette being escorted to the women's section.

Bleicher must have thought a lot of his VIP prisoners because when in May 1943 Peter asked him if he would contact a Parisian pre-war friend, Bleicher sent Suzanne Laurent, his French mistress, to see him. The friend, Charles Fol, was at first very suspicious but he said he would like to help Peter if he could. A little later, Charles received a letter from Peter in prison asking

We discovered that these scenes were shot at another authentic location, namely in the real Fresnes prison where Odette and Peter had been jailed in 1943. *Left:* **The main entrance on what was by 1950 the Avenue de la Division Leclerc.** *Right:* **Also featured is this small exercise yard where the prisoners, like Peter Churchill seen here, could breathe some fresh air.**

Left: **In Paris, the Abwehr offices were based in the Hôtel Lutétia at 43 Boulevard Raspail, near the Sèvres-Babylone metro station.**

Right: **Bleicher's boss was Oberstleutnant Oscar Reile, the commander of the Abwehr's Abteilung III-F (counter-espionage).**

for liquor! From this time on, Fol sent regular parcels to Peter in Fresnes and also to Odette. Occasionally Bleicher would come to fetch the parcels and personally take them to Fresnes. Also, Peter and Odette were allowed to see each other, at least on two or three occasions during the first month.

Around August time, Bleicher rang up Fol and said he was coming to lunch with a surprise for him. The German appeared with Peter and they all stayed chatting together and playing music at the Fols' apartment throughout the afternoon. Charles Fol visited Peter Churchill twice in Fresnes and on the second occasion Bleicher left them alone to talk freely for three quarters of an hour. Peter then said to his friend that he thought Henri (the name under which he knew Bleicher) was a double-agent and he asked him to be as nice as possible to him. On March 7, 1944, when Fol came to bring two parcels to Fresnes, he was told that Peter was no longer there. Up to then, Fol had made up 20 parcels for Peter and 17 for Odette. The following month he delivered the last packet for Odette just before she was transferred to Germany.

On February 13, 1944, Peter was taken to the Gestapo office at 84, Avenue Foch when a deal was discussed of trading him with a German detained in Britain. He was to go to Berlin and from there the exchange was to be made either through Switzerland or Sweden. He was actually taken to Berlin where he

The Gestapo had its offices at No. 82-84 Avenue Foch where Peter Churchill was interrogated twice although his perceived relationship with the British Prime Minister (which was completely erroneous) appears to have saved him from being tortured. It was there in February 1944 that a deal was discussed of trading him with a German detained in Britain.

Situated at the western end of the avenue, not far from the Porte Dauphine, the buildings at 82-84 Avenue Foch have remained exactly as they were during the war. One of the most

notorious buildings in Paris during the Nazi occupation, here Odette was questioned by the Gestapo many times, being subjected to torture on two occasions.

spent three weeks in the cell block of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt headquarters on Prinz-Albrechtstrasse, but no exchange was ever made, and by the beginning of March, he found himself in a small prison camp at Oranienburg, just north of the Reich capital. With the approach of the Russians in April, the prisoners — some 20 people in all — were moved by train to Flossenbürg concentration camp. From there, he was taken to Dachau, then on to a prison camp at Innsbruck as US forces closed in on the area. In Austria he found himself in the company of a large group of German, Austrian, French and Italian VIP prisoners (among them Kurt von Schuschnigg, the pre-war Austrian chancellor; Léon Blum, the French socialist leader; General Garibaldi of Italy; Generaloberst Franz Halder, and many of those associated with the July 20 plot against Hitler). The whole group of some 140 was moved across the Brenner Pass and into Italy where they were housed in a hotel at Villabassa in the Puster mountain valley. Here American troops of the 85th Infantry Division (US Fifth Army) rescued them on May 4, 1945.

As for Odette, on May 12, 1944 she was taken from Fresnes to Karlsruhe, Germany, where she was imprisoned for two months. On July 25, she was moved to Frankfurt-am-Main, then Halle, finally ending up in Ravensbrück concentration camp. The conditions were terrible and she was soon in a very poor state of health. In late April 1945 the camp was speedily evacuated as the Russians approached and Odette was at Malschoff on May 1 when the Ravensbrück camp commandant, SS-Obersturmbannführer Fritz Sühren, sent for her. He then drove her in his car to US lines where she was handed over to the Americans. However, if Sühren thought his last-minute gesture would curry him favours with the Allies, he was in for a surprise as he was tried as a concentration camp commandant and hung in 1950.

Odette finally ended up in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. According to Peter Handford, the sound recordist on the movie, this scene was actually filmed in England, at a location near Gate Studios at Borehamwood where the production was based.

Right to the end, the Germans believed that Peter was related to Winston Churchill, and that Odette was his wife, and to this he undoubtedly owed his favourable treatment and their joint survival . . . and the 'marriage' — which came for real in 1947.

On May 1, 1945, the camp commandant sent for Odette and instructed her to sit in his car. She later recalled that she thought she was being driven to the woods to be shot.

The party moved off and in the evening, to her 'unbelievable relief', she was told that she was driven to the American lines. Some time after 10 p.m. she was handed over to US forces.

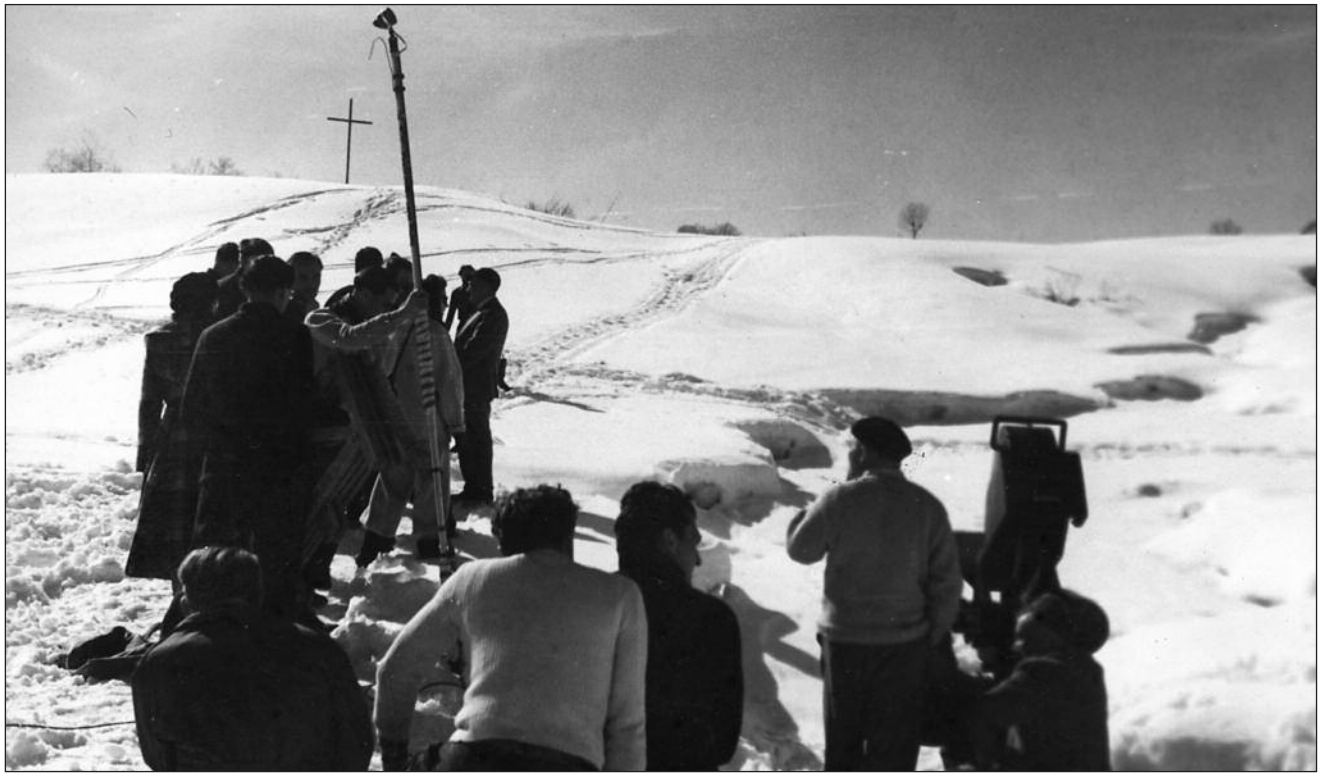
Appointed a Member of the British Empire (MBE) in 1945, Odette Sansom (as she then was) was awarded the George Cross the following year and the Légion d'Honneur in 1950. This picture was taken in November 1946 when she was presented with the GC — primarily a civilian award, second only to the Victoria Cross — by King George VI who had instituted the decoration in 1940. In 1947, after her first husband had died, she married Peter Churchill (left) but the marriage ended in divorce in 1953. In 1956 she married Geoffrey Hallowes, a wine importer, and throughout her post-war life, she was active in many organisations: she was on the committee of the VC and GC association and a vice-president of the FANY, the wartime organisation to which most of the female agents belonged. She died on March 13, 1995.

While he was not actually sound-recording, Peter Handford took many pictures during the filming in France. *Right:* Here he is pictured second left with Anna Neagle and members of the French sound crew. Peter had served with the Army Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU) during the war (see *After the Battle* No. 64) and, after demobilisation, had joined the film industry. His first movie as sound recordist with Herbert Wilcox was *Lady with the Lamp* (the story of Florence Nightingale) followed by *Odette*. In 1985, Peter won an Oscar for his work on Sidney Pollack's *Out of Africa*. Peter was also a keen sound recorder of steam engines (he is the author of a book on the subject, *Sound of Railways and their Recordings*) and when he worked in France on *Odette* he made recordings of steam trains on the SNCF at Annecy, Cannes and Marseille. His record *Trains in the Night* was awarded a Grand Prix du Disque in Paris in 1965.

Left: **Herbert Wilcox (in glasses) supervises the shot while** *(above)* **Max Greene, the director of photography (sitting on right), instructs Austin Dempster, the camera operator. In the foreground the focus puller.**

With Herbert Wilcox striving for authenticity, the locations chosen gave the flavour of wartime France even if they were not always historically accurate. *Left:* Peter did not caption his photos but Jean Paul quickly recognised this picture as being taken in Cannes. The crew are set up at the bottom of Traverse de la Tour (see page 6). *Right:* They are about to shoot the sequence of Lise leaving her safe house — a brothel in Marseille!

Left: **When he saw this photo from Peter's collection, Jean Paul realised that it showed the set-up for the sequence** *(above)* **when Lise and Arnaud carry out their night climb to welcome Raoul. He quickly traced the location by recognising the rocky mountain in the background (the Roc-des-Boeufs, 1610 metres) and found that it had been filmed at the eastern entrance of La Chapelle-Saint-Maurice, a hamlet 10 kilometres south of Saint-Jorioz. There he met a local resident, Georges Bonnot, who clearly remembered that winter afternoon in 1950 (he was then 28 years old) when the scene was shot over and over again with variations in the way Lise and Arnaud climbed the bank. However, Jean Paul quickly realised that the next sequence, that of Raoul's parachute drop, had not been filmed here.**



The film crew arrived in Haute-Savoie on March 3, 1950 and established their quarters at the Hôtel de la Poste at Saint-Jorioz which was still being managed by the Cottets. The real Odette Sansom, by then Mrs Odette Churchill, also came to watch the filming, and when she arrived, Mme Cottet presented her with the very same boots that she had loaned her to climb to the Semnoz in the snow in 1943. Shooting began on March 5, the first sequence being the one showing Lise arriving by boat to meet a Resistance man in the reeds by the side of the lake, the second being that of Lise and Raoul cycling by the side of the lake (see page 11). The following morning the headline in the local newspaper, the *Dauphiné Libéré*, read: 'Odette looks at filming *Odette* at Saint-Jorioz'. The real Peter Churchill joined the party in France on the 7th. The weather was extraordinary fine and the shooting progressed ahead of schedule. The final sequence in the Annecy area was shot on March 10 depicting the arrest of Lise and Raoul in the hotel with locals impersonating the Italian soldiery. The crew then left for Cannes to shoot the Riviera scenes which appear earlier in the film. *Above:* **With Jean Paul's dogged perseverence for finding impossible locations, and with the assistance of Serge Perrier, he discovered that the mountain top scenes were filmed 40 kilometres away at Plainpalais. To recreate the summit, the production team found a snow-covered slope and the camera was positioned low enough so that the trees and houses that were on the far side of the crest could not be seen. The cross was planted in the middle of the slope, masquerading as the actual one on the 1943 drop-site.**

Above: **Several of Peter's photographs showed local women braving the icy-cold water of a communal washing trough and, although it did not appear to be directly relevant to the film, nevertheless Jean Paul was still determined to check it out. When he found it he realised the significance of the location as it was back in Plainpalais. Peter must have been biding his time while the crew prepared the hillside on the right for the bonfire scene (see page 14) and the parachute drop (page 16).** *Below:* **The trough still stands at the cross-roads at the southern entrance of the hamlet.**

Above: **Another of Peter's pictures then fell into place: this sound van had been parked on the D913 to La Fédaz, just a few metres from the set (the hillside is off to the right of this picture).** *Below:* **When he visited Plainpalais in May 2003, Jean Paul met two local residents who had been living there in 1950 and they told him how the production team had recruited local people to portray men of the Resistance waiting by the bonfires and setting them alight, some of them no doubt re-enacting similar events in which they had participated during the war.**

Below: **The comparison of Odette arriving at the Saint-Charles railway station in Marseille shows little change in 50 years although this sequence is really much too long and overdramatised. In reality Spindle achieved very little on the Riviera.**

Odette **was released in Britain at a Royal Premiere on June 6, 1950, three years before Hugo Bleicher's memoirs were published and long before any official records of SOE activities in France were available. All the public knew then was based on Jerrard Tickell's book, and a special publication was produced under his authorship, based on the screenplay by Warren Chetham-Strode, to be released with the film. Reviewers recognised Wilcox's 'uncompromising sincerity' and 'his painstaking location trips which have set the piece authentically against its actual background' (although as we have seen with Jean Paul's research, not in every case). The reviews generally considered Anna Neagle's performance as 'a thoroughly workmanlike job' and that it would be a considerable shock to cinemagoers who normally associated her dressed in ballgowns and exuding the 'spring of Mayfair'. The credibility of the film was seen to be guaranteed by the inclusion of Colonel Maurice Buckmaster although none of the reviews commented on the brief appearance of Captain Peter Churchill. Odette's direct contribution is her epilogue which appears at the end of the film as her final testament: 'It is with a sense of deep humility that I have allowed my personal story to be told. I am a very ordinary woman, to whom a chance was given to see human beings at their best and at their worst. I knew kindness as well as cruelty, understanding as well as bestiality. My comrades, who did far more than I, and suffered far more profoundly, are not here to speak. Because of this, I speak for them and I would like this film to be a window through which may be seen those very gallant women with whom I had the honour to serve. It is to their memory that this picture has been made.'**

In *After the Battle* No. 91 we told the story of the Hammelburg Raid, the ill-fated attempt by a task force of the US 4th Armored Division to liberate Allied prisoners of war held at the Oflag XIII-B camp at Hammelburg on March 27-28, 1945. The foiled foray by Task Force Baum remains one of the most tragic tales of the 1944-45 campaign in Europe and one that never fails to fascinate whoever hears of it. Since its publication, many of our readers have used the Hammelburg issue as travel guides for their own trips to the area. In March 2003, an American tour group arrived in Germany for a three-day battlefield tour of the Hammelburg region. What made this travel party very special was that it included several veterans of the action, prime among them Abraham Baum himself, the legendary commander of the task force. Two of our German readers, Oberstleutnant (Lieutenant-Colonel) Peter Domes and Hauptfeldwebel (Staff Sergeant) Martin Heinlein, both of whom in recent years have distinguished themselves by their research into the action (see issue 106, page 8, and issue 119, page 50), were asked to guide the tour party around the battlefield. In what amounted to another '48 hours to Hammelburg', this time by deluxe coach, they took the party along the original route travelled by Task Force Baum in 1945, taking in all the major sites connected with this operation. *Right:* Domes (second from left) and Heinlein (right) proudly pose with Abe Baum (second from right) and Bob Zawada (left), in 1945 a private in Baum's force, on the Saale river bridge at Gemünden. (I. Kleibömer)

THE HAMMELBURG RAID — 2003

By Oberstleutnant Peter Domes

Ever since reading the book *Spessart und Maingebiet im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Spessart and the Main Region in the Second World War) by Dr Alois Stadtmüller as a boy of 14, I have been fascinated by the story of Task Force Baum and the Hammelburg Raid. The story also prompted me to use my limited budget to build up a collection of literature about the subject.

Since the summer of 1999, I have been studying the Hammelburg Raid in detail — an undertaking motivated in no small way by issue No. 91 of *After the Battle*, which came out in February 1996. The development of the Internet led me to make specific use of this medium for my research. A homepage was created (*http://www.taskforcebaum.de*) which has gradually increased in size and become more comprehensive. With the passage of time, valuable contacts and friendships have been made in both Germany and the USA. This was how I had the good fortune to link up with Hauptfeldwebel (Staff Sergeant) Martin Heinlein, who was then at the Infanterie-Schule (Infantry School) Hammelburg. We decided to co-operate and, with the view to organising our research more effectively, joined forces with a number of others to set up the 'Task Force Baum Working Group' in the spring of 2001. At the time of writing, the group consists of six members.

In the meantime, the scope of our research has increased considerably. We have established good relations with men who took part in the raid, and also with living witnesses on both sides. Fortunately, the flow of information shows no sign of drying up.

Through a member of our working group in the USA — Bob Thompson of Tulsa, Oklahoma, a former POW in Oflag XIII-B Hammelburg — Phil Beron of the National D-Day Museum in New Orleans contacted me about a proposed battlefield tour to Germany by some 30 persons in March 2003. The main focus of the trip would be the Hammelburg Raid. News of our research had reached the USA, and Phil asked me to act as guide for this section of the tour. A hint that an actual veteran of Task Force Baum would be in the party finally clinched it — my mind was made up and I accepted his offer. Fortunately I was able to count on Martin Heinlein, who was keen to join me in organising the tour. Martin was currently on a posting abroad in Bosnia, but luckily he managed to get leave for this period. Shortly afterwards, Beron got in touch again with the news that other interesting people wanted to join the party, including Bob Zawada, who had been a radio operator on the raid. And to our great surprise, Abraham J. Baum, the commander of the task force, had also signed up for the trip. Pat Waters, the son of John K. Waters (General George S. Patton's son-in-law whose presence in Oflag XIII-B had triggered Patton's motivation for the raid), had also expressed an interest, but unfortunately he had to cancel at the last moment.

Beron gave me a free hand as far as preparations for the tour were concerned. I planned the following schedule: Saturday, March 22 for the route from Aschaffenburg to Hammelburg, and Sunday, March 23 to be spent at the Hammelburg Military Camp and Training Area. The latter would also be accessible as there is no firing at weekends. During our years of research, we had established good connections with local historical societies and eyewitnesses, and I decided to give those concerned the opportunity to meet Abe Baum, and tell the story of the raid from a German perspective — that of locals on the ground.

In preparation for the tour, I drove round the route once more with my son, Philipp, to see if it presented any problems for the coach. Of all places, just between Burgsinn and Weickersgrüben — Baum's forced detour around Gemünden — the road went under a bridge with a clearance of just 3.5m. The bus was 3.62m high, and so I was obliged to leave out a really interesting section, forego an on-the-spot presentation and make do with a description of what had taken place. Needless to say I was glad to have found out about this in advance. We also called on two of our working group members, Roland Seubert, of the Geschichtsverein Laufachtal (Laufach Valley Historical Society), and Karl-Heinz Schroll, chief of the history section at the Volkshochschule (Further Education College) in Lohr, who would both be involved with the tour.

A further conversation with Beron revealed that the party would arrive at Aschaffenburg, our departure point, on Thursday, March 20, and wanted to visit the Wehrtechnische Studien-Sammlung (Bundeswehr Ordnance Museum) at Koblenz, 75 miles to the north-west, on the Friday. I suggested that the group should also visit what remains of the Remagen bridge (see *After the Battle* No. 16) — an absolute must for every American WW2 veteran — and offered to accompany this leg of the tour as well. This was no problem for me since I am stationed in Remagen, and Koblenz is only half an hour's drive. 'Great idea!' commented Beron.

As a preliminary to the Hammelburg tour, the party visited the Remagen bridge. Standing in front of the surviving towers, Peter Domes (in uniform) describes the action of March 7, 1945. Most of the participants in the 'Happy Few Group' tour were WW2 veterans. (F. Denton)

FRIDAY MARCH 21, 2003

The big day had arrived. My comrades at the Logistikzentrum des Heeres (Army Logistics Command) in Remagen sensed my nervousness and did their best to reassure me. 'It'll be fine. After all, you're well prepared.' At 1000 hours I set off for the Remagen Bridge Peace Museum. The weather was looking good, with a promise of it staying sunny and warm for the whole weekend. After a delay — during which I was getting more and more nervous — the big white coach pulled up. On the windscreen was a big sticker — 'Happy Few Group'.

1100 hours: I boarded the bus and made the acquaintance of a bunch of really nice guys, who greeted me with a big, 'Hello'. After I had briefly introduced myself, we walked over to the historic bridge ramp where I spoke for about half an hour, describing the fighting and the taking of the bridge. My audience was extremely eager to learn — there were many questions about the conduct of the war in March 1945. Cameras clicked, video cameras whirred, and I found myself staring into dictaphones. After my briefing, it was off to the museum, and my first opportunity to talk to Abe Baum.

1230 hours: After many questions about the bridge and its construction, we returned to the coach and on to our next port of call — the Wehrtechnische Studien-Sammlung at Koblenz. I asked Abe Baum to sit next to me — an offer which he gratefully accepted — and so I had another chance of a very interesting conversation.

1300 hours: The veterans were greatly taken with the exhibits in the museum. The Panther tank was impressive, as was the Sturmgeschütz III. Standing in front of an American M5 Stuart light tank, we had our first opportunity to discuss the Hammelburg Raid itself. Baum explained that Lieutenant Colonel Creighton Abrams had let the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion have one of these tanks for the battalion's command group. Abe had been in it quite a few times — it was fast and had a good radio. The command group's tank had also gone on the Hammelburg Raid on March 27, 1945. So now I knew why six light tanks had taken part — it was promising to be an interesting weekend.

As far as the task force's assault guns were concerned, Baum confirmed that they were in fact Sherman tanks equipped with a 105mm howitzer, and not the M7A1 self-propelled howitzers (see *After the Battle* No. 107, page 8). With the aid of some plastic models which were on display, we were able to compare the Ferdinand — the type of German tank destroyer often mentioned in American books — with the Hetzer, which was actually there on the day. Over and over again came the question, 'Where do they have a Hetzer here?' — 'All in good time! We'll be seeing one soon enough', I replied. Time and again I had to give details about the weapons and vehicles — 'What's a muzzle-brake?'. . . 'How does a bore evacuator work?' — and so on. The veterans showed a keen interest in German arms technology.

At 1430 I used the public address system to call the 'Happy Few Group' back to the coach — it was late and the veterans had not yet had their lunch. I said goodbye for the day, and they continued along the Rhine and past the Lorelei rock. I went back home and then set off with my family for Burgsinn. There followed a number of telephone conversations with those who were to go into action on Saturday.

SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 2003

Punctually at 0800 the regional express train drew into Gemünden from Würzburg. Martin Heinlein, my son Philipp and I were relieved it was not late — everything went according to plan. We had arranged to meet the American group in front of Aschaffenburg main railway station at 0845 so the short drive gave us the chance to run through the programme again.

We spotted some veterans on the station concourse and once again there was a big 'Hello'. At 0900 we arrived at the day's first stop — the Nilkheim railway bridge just south of Aschaffenburg. At the time of the raid, this bridge was very important because without it Combat Command B of the US 4th Armored Division would not have got across the Main river so easily. The German officers in command had opted to surrender to the Americans.

A nice young lady and a photographer from the *Main-Echo* newspaper were waiting for us. During the preparation phase we had promised the local press that they would be fully involved — the raid is still a matter of some importance in the Unterfranken region. In the space of half an hour, Martin and I did our best to explain the events leading up to the raid, and describe the situation around Nilkheim and Schweinheim on March 25, 1945. Bob Zawada — then a platoon radio operator in Company A of the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion — remembered the crossing. As he went over the bridge in his M3 half-track, he was feeling pretty uneasy. When the lady journalist asked Baum how he had come to be given the mission, he related with great amusement the story of Lieutenant Colonel Harold Cohen and his piles. This was the signal for much laughter from the veterans.

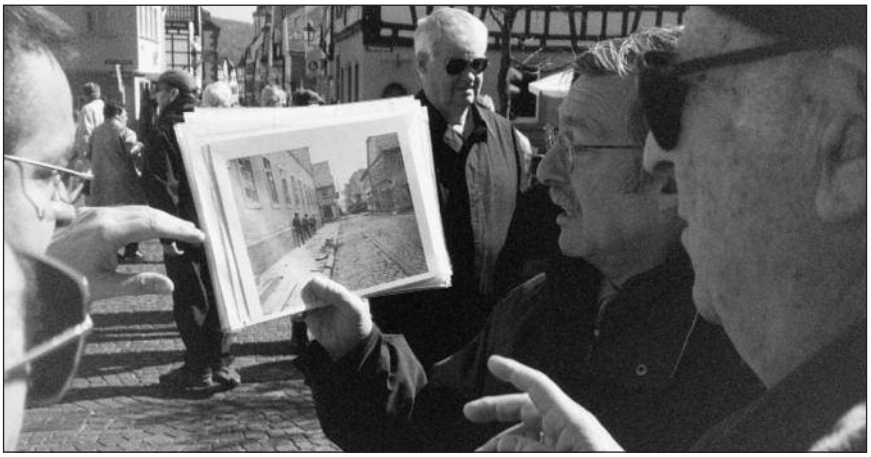
0945 hours: We crossed the Main and briefly pointed out Castle Johannesburg, which at the time was the headquarters of Major Emil Lamberth, the Kampfkommandant leading the defence of Aschaffenburg. In Schweinheim we turned onto the Althol-Strasse, which took us onto the route followed by Task Force Baum. We could not use the original stretch from the Bischberg hill down into the town, as it was closed to all traffic. What with parked cars and on-coming traffic, the narrow roads caused a few problems for the coach, but this gave time to describe the fighting in Schweinheim and explain TF Baum's breakthrough there. Before Haibach, we reached the B8 and glanced across at the two remaining military barracks, which the task force had passed at some distance. I described the events as we retraced the route — small-arms fire from the Germans, casualties among the American armoured infantry. The townscapes had changed considerably over the past 58 years, but some of the churches looked the same, as did some individual houses. Between Keilberg and the Aschaffsteg, the road had taken a completely different route since the war — luckily we had come across a 1937 map during our research. Near the Weiberhöfe (a hamlet east of Hösbach railway station) we reached the B26 — the direct route to Lohr and Gemünden.

Peter Domes delivering his briefing at the Nilkheim railway bridge, the jump-off point for the raid. Abe Baum stands ready to add his personal recollections while in the background reporters of the *Main-Echo* newspaper listen in. (J. Sudmeier)

1015 hours: There was someone already waiting for us in front of the railway station at Laufach. Roland Seubert of the Laufach Historical Society — a member of our working group — climbed aboard and told us what had taken place in Laufach in the early hours of March 27, 1945. 'It was three o'clock in the morning and my mother, who was a 15-year-old girl at the time, saw an endless column of tanks going by. They were 20 metres from her and she thought the war was over. Some soldiers asked another girl — an 18-year-old by the name of Josefine — for food and coffee. She replied that she hadn't got enough food for herself and, as for real coffee, well, she hadn't seen any of that for years. The landlord of an inn offered the soldiers some watery beer late that night but they didn't think much of it.'

We drove on to what had then been the last house in the village, and Seubert explained it was here that the task force's leading tank got damaged by a Panzerfaust and was towed along for a short distance. (The fact that a tank had been hit at Laufach was unknown when *After the Battle* published the story of the raid in 1996.) There is some dispute about what really happened but, as Seubert pointed out, in some cases history needs to be corrected. The Americans were up against 15 German soldiers — and not 400 as American sources have it. Nevertheless the story went round Laufach that quarters had been sought for 400 German soldiers. One American and five Germans were killed during this exchange. The American casualty was left behind by the viaduct at Hain, his body covered with a blanket and with a spade nearby. He is said to have had red hair and freckles but his identity is unknown.

We drove on through the Spessart — the largest continuous area of forest in Germany. At the crossroads known as Siebenwege, I explained what had happened at 0400 at the headquarters of the German 7. Armee, then located at Heigenbrücken, just five kilometres north from the B26 road. A change of command had just taken place there when, from a distance, the sound of heavy vehicles could be heard moving eastwards. At Bischborner Hof — at the time of the raid a camp of the Reichsarbeitsdienst (Reich Labour Service) — we explained about the German soldiers who are said to have been surprised by the task force during their morning PT. We were now fast approaching Lohr, and at a spot called the Wasserhauskurve (Water House Bend) I told the story of Albin Geist, who was shot to pieces by the task force's light tanks while



Walking the pedestrian area of Lohr, local historian Karl-Heinz Schroll (centre) shows Baum where one of the pictures of the fighting in the town was taken. The picture in question is one of the Signal Corps photos of the advance by the US 14th Armored Division, taken in Lohr a few days after Task Force Baum passed through — see issue 91, page 9. (J. Sudmeier)

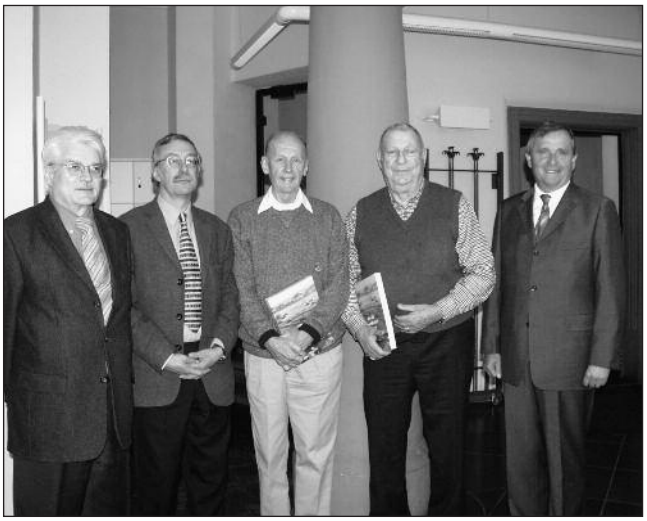
driving along in his wood-gas-powered truck. At this point some of the veterans opened issue 91 of *After the Battle* in anticipation of our walk through the 'Hänsel and Gretel' town of Lohr.

1130 hours: A small group of people, including reporter Inken Kleibömer of the *Main-Echo* and *Main Post* regional newspapers, were waiting for us at a car park in Lohr not 100 metres from where the road-block (created by felling poplar trees) once stood by the Felsenkeller Restaurant. Karl-Heinz Schroll, chief of the history section at the Volkshochschule (Further Education College) in Lohr, got on the coach and greeted the veterans. Herr Schroll explained that the Americans are greatly respected in Lohr and that every child in Lohr in particular knows three names. The Military Government officer in charge of the town after its capture, Captain Edward Kelly, had done a lot for the town after the war. One of his staff, Sergeant Edward Koch, later became Mayor of New York. However, the most interesting personality is Abe Baum, who raced through the town towards Gemünden on March 27, 1945. The way the townspeople of Lohr remember it, no tanks were knocked out at the road-block . . . and its barrier had not even been closed. The Americans were taken aback by a member of the Volkssturm (Home Guard) but all he did was willingly point the way to Gemünden. Actually, it is our theory today that the Sherman tank said by the Americans to have been destroyed at the entrance to Lohr (which none of the locals remember) was in fact knocked out at the eastern exit of Laufach (where, as we have seen, the locals do remember such an incident), the more so since both versions have one American tanker killed.

As we walked through the pedestrian precinct, the witnesses that Herr Schroll had brought along told us their stories and their experiences on that day, and also of later when the US 14th Armored Division arrived in Lohr and got involved in heavy fighting. An elderly man remembered how his 65-year-old uncle had asked for — and was given — a long black cigar by one of the tank commanders. Abe Baum said, 'that must have been [2nd Lieutenant William] Nutto — no doubt about it. He was always smoking those things.' In front of the old town hall, passers-by came up and spoke to the veterans. Baum later said he felt himself overwhelmed by the friendliness and warmth of the townspeople he met.

They were expecting us at the old town hall. The Mayor, Siegfried Selinger, warmly welcomed us to his town, and light refreshments were served. The Mayor presented Robert Zawada and Abe Baum with a copy of the book *Als die Amerikaner kamen* (The Day the Americans Came) as a souvenir of their visit to Lohr.

An inhabitant of Lohr describes to Baum and Domes how an American tank commander presented his uncle with a cigar. 'That must have been Lieutenant Nutto!', reacted Baum. (I. Kleibömer).



Mayor Sigfried Selinger of Lohr presents Baum and Zawada with the book *Als die Amerikaner kamen*. L-R: author Meinrad Amrein, Schroll, Baum, Zawada, and Mayor Selinger. (I. Kleibömer)

Next stand on the tour: the old bridge across the Saale river at Gemünden. It was here that the Germans first seriously opposed Baum on March 27, 1945, knocking out three of his tanks in close street fighting and blowing up the bridge, thereby thwarting the task force's direct route to Hammelburg. (J. Sudmeier)

1430: We left the friendly town of Lohr — it had been quite an occasion for both sides. Along the valley of the Main, with the river to our right and the railway line to our left, we approached Gemünden. We described the events surrounding the German trains met by the task force, and pointed out the spot where the flak train had been abandoned near Neuendorf. The approach to Kleingemünden followed the new bypass, as the old railway crossing below the Zollberg hill had been removed years ago. The townscape had altered in the Frankfurter Strasse, too, as quite a lot of houses had burnt to the ground during the battle. Here, a glance at issue 91 of *After the Battle* clarified matters.

It was somewhat quieter in Gemünden, where we were received by just two people — Albrecht Englert and his wife, who had come along in response to my request. In front of the Huttenschloss — formerly a camp of the Reichsarbeitsdienst and now a transport museum — we found ourselves standing before an impressive type BR44 steam engine, the kind that was used to haul freight trains. I explained that this was the typical freight engine used by the Deutsche Reichsbahn (German State Railways) in the 1940s. The trains which Baum had destroyed must have been pulled by this or a similar type of engine.

Herr Englert — not a native of Gemünden but of Wertheim — had already been very helpful to us in our research, having provided us with material about the events surrounding the blowing up of the Saale river bridge. Oberfeldwebel Eugen Zöller, the engineer sergeant who had witnessed and taken a leading part in that battle, had been at school with Herr Englert and so he knew him well. Englert had been involved in several of the briefings organised by the US Army in Gemünden as part of battlefield tours in the 1980s. During the war he had been a signaller with the 19. Armee in the Upper Rhine area, and had monitored German radio traffic about Task Force Baum and the general confusion in the Mainfranken region.

Abe Baum told us how he recalled the fighting in Gemünden: 'My only thought was, "Let's just get the hell out of this place". The worst thing the Germans had was their Panzerfaust, and right here they were even using them to fire at my men!' During the withdrawal from Kleingemünden — probably due to a sense of frustration — the American tanks opened fire on the village from a point level with the present German war cemetery, and set the place ablaze.

Unfortunately we could not go via Burgsinn and Gräfendorf because, as already explained, the coach was too high. Yet this was just the place where we had found a number of witnesses who could tell us about the various Germans who had been press-ganged by the task force to act as guides. We had also found, and could have indicated, the exact spot where the M5A1 Stuart light tank had shed a track and been abandoned in Burgsinn — at the Roten Weg.

1530: The coach now followed the direct route from Gemünden to Hammelburg — the one which had been denied to Baum at the time. We went through Hessdorf and Höllrich, and I was able to point out the tower on the Reussenberg hill (427 metres), which was clearly visible over the top of the bare trees. This was where on March 27, 1945, Hauptmann Rose of the Eisenbahnpionierschule (Army Railway Engineer School) Berlin had sat as an observer and reported all movements of Task Force Baum. As early as 1400 hours he had already reported the column on the main road at the locality known as Hainbuche, just west of Obereschenbach.

At Untereschenbach, the wide valley of the Saale now lay before us, and Hammelburg was clearly visible at a distance of two kilometres. 'Where were the Hetzers positioned?', my fellow passengers immediately wanted to know. The B27 still follows the same route as it did in 1937. It is only before Hammelburg that the route has changed with the construction of the new bypass. Artur Hurrlein (another member of our working group) and his school friend Georg Schlereth was due to meet us at the car park in front of the new bridge over the Saale.

Unbeknown to us the local newspaper, the *Saale-Zeitung*, had already reported the arrival of the veterans in its Saturday edition, and so around 40 other townspeople had come along in addition to Artur and Georg. As had been the case in Lohr, the Americans were welcomed most warmly. Baum asked me jokingly, "What's happened to the brass band?" Hammelburg wine was served together with Winzer-Brötchen — special bread rolls. The Deputy Mayor, Stefan Seufert, welcomed the group to his town and thanked key members of the local history society for having made all the arrangements.

Martin Heinlein was now fully in his element. After all he had given enough lectures about the Baum Raid for the Hammelburg Infantry School. With all the experience of a platoon sergeant, he pointed out the relevant terrain landmarks and gave a clear summary of the battle, which had taken place in the Saale valley. Artur Hurrlein and Georg Schlereth also spoke — as 14-year-old school friends they had been eyewitnesses. Georg told us how he had watched the arrival of the Hetzers at the Hammelburg railway station: 'As the train drew into the station, the crews were already aboard their tank destroyers with the engines running. In less than five minutes, they were thundering out of the station at high speed, and heading up the B27 towards Bad Brückenau.'

Artur explained how the battle had developed in the Saale valley, and where the knocked-out vehicles had been abandoned. Three American tanks had even made it across the bridge, but had not managed to get into the town. German soldiers planned to blow up the bridge, but the fuse must have gone out. One soldier and a Hitlerjugend boy were lying by the church with a machine gun, but Artur and his brother Hans tried to dissuade them from firing at the tanks.

'You're surely not planning to fire at those tanks with a machine gun!' — 'Shut your mouth or I'll shoot you', came the curt reply. A reaction to the short machine-gun burst was less than a minute in coming. One of Baum's assault guns opened fire and the 105mm shell crashed into the slope in front of the church. But there was no explosion — the shell was a dud.

The eyewitness accounts gave us an impressive picture of how the battle must have been on that afternoon in March 1945. The Germans lost their supply trucks and Baum lost half-tracks carrying fuel and ammunition. The American vehicles, which had been under fire, had turned right off the B27 and onto a field to get out of sight of the Hetzers and seek relative safety — but the field was marshy. It must have taken over an hour for the vehicles to assemble on the slope of the Lagerberg (the hill leading to the

In the car park outside Hammelburg, Martin Heinlein (left) uses a map to explain the fighting in the Saale river valley. (Happy Few Group)

Left: **Baum is presented with a framed copy of the *Mainfränkische Zeitung* of March 31, 1945, featuring a headline story on his raid — see issue 91, page 37. (J. Sudmeier)** *Right:* **Abe Baum meets one of his armoured opponents of 1945 again. The Hammelburg Infantry School museum has a Hetzer tank destroyer, the type so effectively deployed by schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 251 to oppose Baum's force as it approached Hammelburg and later in the final battle on Hill 427. (H. Haas)**

military camp) and get going again. As Baum explained, 'My orders were to drive fast and not to get drawn into pointless combat with the Germans.' After the battle, the schoolboys rummaged around in the knocked-out American vehicles. Artur filled bottles with petrol, and found a wooden box containing a welding kit — which to everyone's surprise he had brought along with him.

Abe Baum was especially pleased to see Karl Stürzenberger's son again — he had already met him in 1979 while he was researching his own book *Raid*. At the time, Stürzenberger Sr had been made to guide the task force from Weickersgrüben to Hammelburg. He had pleaded to be allowed to stay at home but the Americans had taken him with them. His wife was already in labour and fortunately Baum let him go at the junction of the road from Weickersgrüben with the B27. Baum was also pleased to learn that the birth had gone well.

It was 1700, and we had come to the end of our guided tour. The 'Happy Few Group' went off to a hotel in Morlesau, and Marion Heinlein took us to Obereschenbach, where I was to meet my wife, Ulrike. We had got through the first day and were exhausted from the continual presentations. Unfortunately Martin could only manage the Saturday as he had promised to be with his family on Sunday as on Wednesday he was due to return to Bosnia for another two months.

That evening the veterans had invited us with our wives to a special dinner to mark the occasion. In the hotel, we also met Tony deSanto, who was the personal guest of Abe Baum. Tony lives in Germany and had been a prisoner at Oflag XIII-B — he was one of the POWs freed who managed to make his way through to the American lines. During the course of the evening, Phil Beron thanked Martin and me for the preparation and execution of the tour, and gave us a copy of the book *Twenty-five Yards of War* by Ronald J. Drez. All of them had signed their names, and two veterans even signed the chapters, which referred to them. We had also not come empty-handed. As a token of our admiration, Abe Baum received a framed picture of the front page of the final edition of the *Mainfränkische Zeitung*, which appeared at the end of March 1945 — featuring the 'The Example of Hammelburg' article. In the presence of the veterans, Martin and I also took the opportunity to thank our wives for their understanding and support in this time-consuming hobby — there were two large bouquets and a thunderous standing ovation.

SUNDAY, MARCH 23, 2003

0845: I waited with my son Philipp at the entrance to the Infanterie-Schule. A car drew up and parked beside ours. The soldier who got out had put on his camouflaged uniform for the occasion — it was Andreas Kukuk — another member of our working group. Andreas is a Hauptfeldwebel (Staff Sergeant) attached to the Regional Infantry Training Centre, and knows the training area like the back of his hand. Then in rapid succession we were joined by the others who would be involved in the events of that Sunday. Hanns-Helmuth Schnebel — the Infantry School librarian and member of the Hammelburg Local History Society (Baum had already met him in 1979, when the latter had helped him with the research for his book); Artur Hurrlein and Georg Schlereth, who did not let the fact that this was a Sunday stop them from joining us; and Hauptmann Johann Bschor — the Commanding Officer of the Hammelburg Military Training Area — and his Hauptfeldwebel Heiko Haas, who would ensure that we had access to the camp and training area.

Hauptmann Bschor had the key to the Large Exhibits Hall of the camp museum, and so I was able to keep my promise to Abe Baum and Bob Zawada: they got to see a Hetzer tank destroyer! (It was actually the post-war Swiss Army G13 model.) Zawada explained the details of the American M3 half-track, which was also on display. Bob Zawada wanted to see the building where he had been taken after losing his leg on Hill 427. In front of the former camp hospital, I explained the set-up of Oflag XIII-B and Tony deSanto told us of his experiences behind barbed wire as a 'guest of the Third Reich'. After this we went past the 'French Cross', the large wooden crucifix that had been erected after WW1 by former French POWs, to the Hundsfeld—Bonnland section of the training area. The veterans were particularly impressed by the Bonnland training village. It looks like a typical village of the Franken region in the 1940s — and is carefully maintained by the Bundeswehr. At the time Abe Baum never made it this far, his advance having been blocked by anti-tank obstacles between Hundsfeld and Bonnland.

Tour participants alight from the coach at Bonnland, one of the training villages within the Hammelburg military training area. Baum in 1945 never got to Bonnland, a German road-block beyond Hundsfeld turning back his nightly probe in that direction. (H. Haas)

Final stop of the tour was Hill 427, site of Task force Baum's last stand. Standing on the very spot where it all happened, Baum relates how his men were overwhelmed by the concentric German attack. (Happy Few Group)

We drove back to the west gate of the camp and from there over the so-called Kolonnenweg, past the Zinkelsberg hill to the Reussenberg (Hill 427). This was the route, which had also been taken by the column back in 1945. However, we first continued out of the training area towards the village of Höllrich, where I explained how the first attempt at break-out had been thwarted by Hauptmann Franz Gehrig and his officer cadets at the junction of the B27. We then drove back to Hill 427 — the final rallying point of Task Force Baum, and also our final stopping point.

At what had previously been a farmstead known as the Reussenberger Hof, I went over the sequence of events in the German attack on Hill 427 and the special role — hitherto largely unrecognised — played by Major Walter Eggemann, a holder of the Ritterkreuz, who organised it. Abe Baum stepped out in front and explained in his own words how the operation had come to an end. There had been no surrender, but rather the departure of small groups from the battlefield. Baum was wounded while being taken prisoner, and admitted to the Serbian Hospital at the POW camp.

1330: Back at the main gate of the Infanterie-Schule, Georg Schlereth was not to be outdone. He gave each of the 30 veterans a bottle of Hammelburg wine as a token of his thanks for what he had learnt from the Americans in 1945, namely 'the notion of democracy and the right of free speech'. We took our leave of the veterans, who thanked us warmly for the trouble we had gone to, and we waved after the coach as it drove off. Monday would be another tiring day for them — off to Leipzig for Colditz Castle and from there to Berlin. The 48 hours at Hammelburg were over. I was exhausted, but very happy.

The end of a unique return visit. Surveying the battlefield of 59 years ago from Hill 427. (H. Haas)

Storage space for ordnance in Britain was already acute in 1940 so when American forces began to arrive in strength in the UK in 1943, the only option was to stockpile explosives out in the open. Lying just south of Marlborough in Wiltshire, the huge Savernake Forest was ideally situated for use by US forces which were predominantly based in the West Country. This picture, taken in September 1943, shows 100lb General Purpose HE bombs dispersed in one of the forest clearings. (USNA)

THE SAVERNAKE FOREST EXPLOSIONS

By Mike Christensen

Britain entered the Second World War seriously short of capacity to manufacture munitions. In the years immediately after 1918, the overwhelming desire for peace meant that the munitions factories were rapidly dismantled, leaving just those at Woolwich and Enfield in production, with Hereford kept as reserve.

The construction of new plants to match the rearmament of the 1930s was difficult because the Army requirement was frequently changed. In July 1935, it was decided that there should be a programme to provide munitions support for an army of five divisions, quickly changed to six divisions, then to ten divisions in February 1939 which was increased two months later to 32. Then, on September 11, 1939, the War Cabinet authorised planning for the supply for no less than 55 divisions, though this was soon scaled back to 36 in February 1940.

The growth in requirement was matched by a series of decisions to increase the capacity of the 'filling' factories. (Filling is the process of assembling explosives with mechanical components to produce completed ordnance.)

In 1940, the demand for ordnance so outstripped capacity that during the Battle of Britain, lorries were queuing up at the partly-completed factory at Swynnerton to collect ammunition for the RAF airfields in southern England. Thus, at this stage of the war, there was no requirement for storage capacity but by 1942 the situation had changed significantly. The factories were all working round the clock and further increases in productivity resulted from the introduction of piece work. This, and the scaling down of War Office requirements, saw the abandonment of some of the 1940 programme factories. Consumption of munitions overseas in 1941 had been significantly less than was expected so it was ironic that just as the filling factories were coming to peak production, the demand for their products began to tail off. Thereafter stockpiling for the invasion of Europe was to be a steady programme over the next two years.

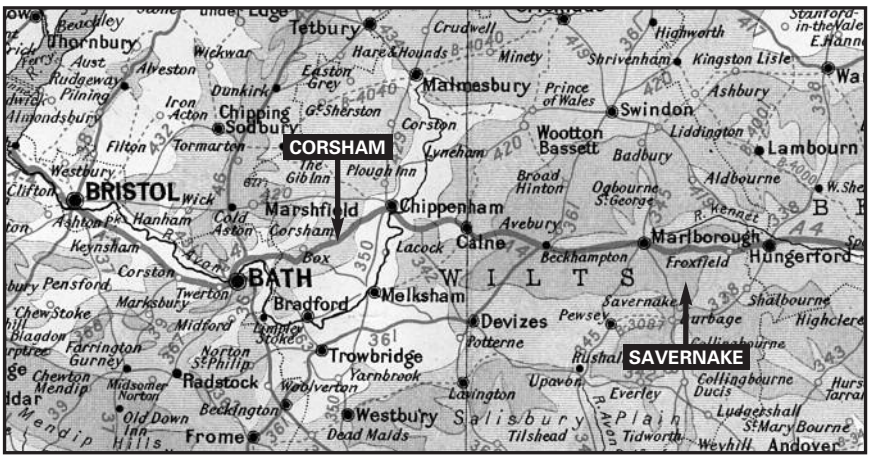
THE FOREST DUMPS

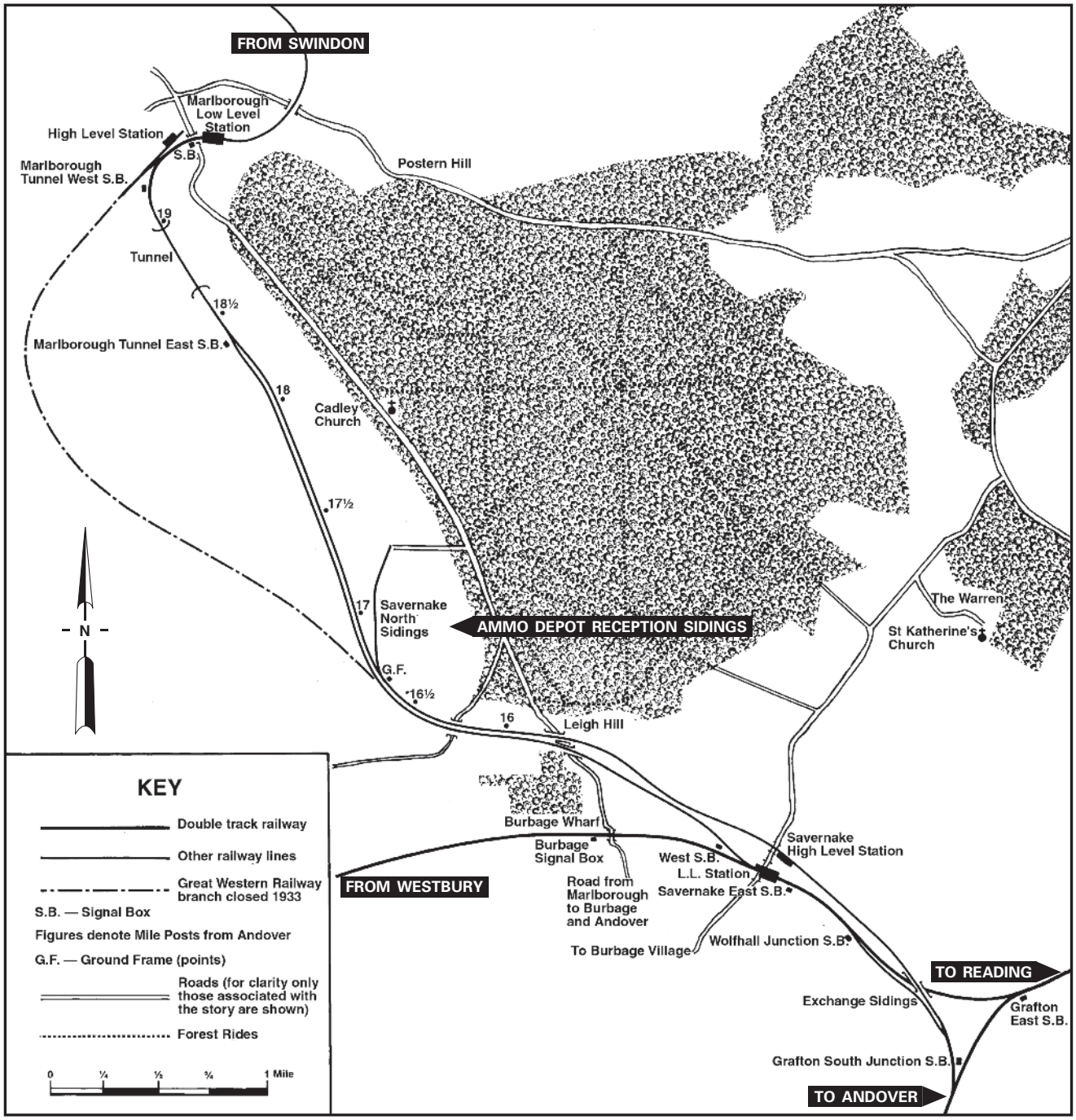
The growth in the capacity of the filling factories was mirrored by the expansion of the Central Ammunition Depots (CADs). Construction of some depots, intended to store the munitions from the 1937 programme factories, began in 1938. However, the work often proved to be difficult, especially where the conversion of existing underground quarries was concerned. By 1940 it was clear that the CADs under construction would be inadequate, and that further sites were needed, so work on a new group of depots started in the autumn.

While there was a case for constructing some long-life storage facilities, it became evident that much of the ammunition storage capacity would only be required for a few months — or years at the most. To provide covered accommodation for all the ammunition in production could not be justified, nor was it practical. In consequence, the armed services began to develop outdoor storage facilities.

In eastern England, bombs were simply stockpiled on roadside verges close to the bases where they were to be used. Concrete hardstandings were laid down and there was little attempt to camouflage the stores other than to sheet some of them over. The roads were closed to all but the local population who were provided with appropriate passes. The bombs were safe enough without their primers, though the farmer who was fined for burning rubbish in the space between two stacks of bombs was taking a bit of a risk!

For larger concentrations of munitions, open-air dumps were set up in heavily forested land, which reduced the exposure to the worst of the weather, and provided an almost impenetrable cover against air attack. In Savernake Forest just south of Marlborough in Wiltshire, among the rides with names which told of their long history (such as Charcoal Burners Road and Post Wives Walk), the War Office created hundreds of small storage areas. From this location it would be relatively easy to deliver supplies to the south coast ports when the invasion began. Savernake was established as a sub-depot of the CAD at Corsham.





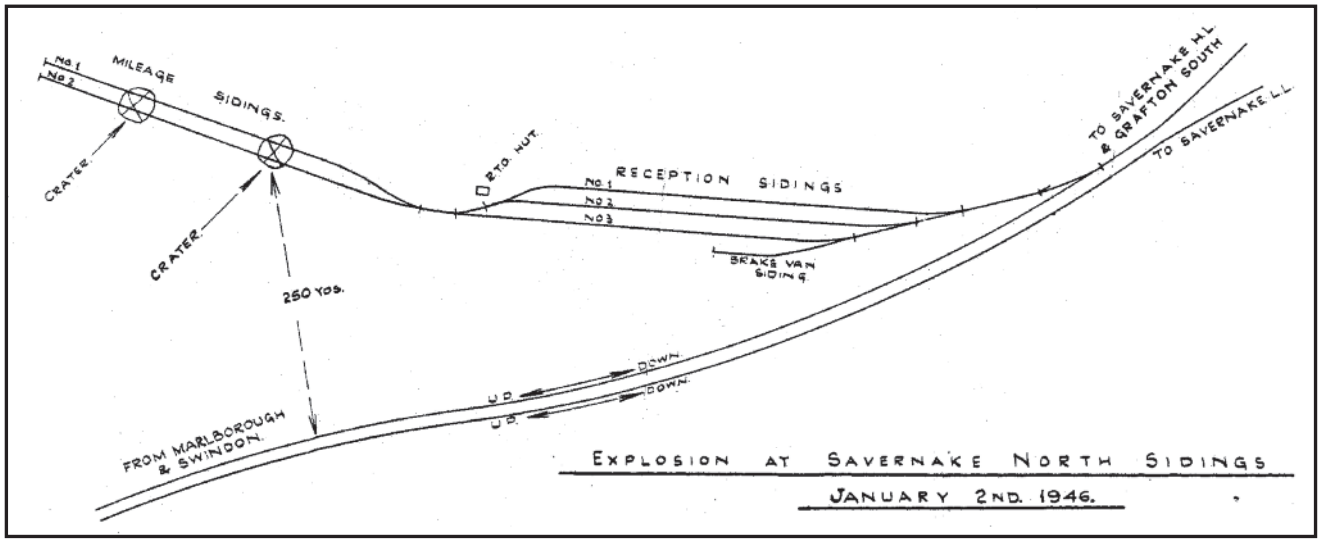
TRANSPORT TO SAVERNAKE

The logistics of moving ammunition to the forest storage areas was not simple. Shortages of vehicles, and more crucially of petrol, meant that it could not be carried all the way from factory to dump by lorry. The steep gradients in the forest, and the need to service a multitude of small storage sites, meant that it was impractical to build railway up to each location. The usual compromise was to build a road/rail transfer (RRT) installation at a spot convenient for the dump. The ammunition could then be brought in by train to be unloaded onto lorries. At Savernake the ammunition was usually brought by rail to the former High Level Station in Marlborough, and then taken by road to the forest.

The need for temporary storage facilities — particularly in the West Country — was greatly increased as supplies poured in from the USA. As the American material would be in Britain for only a few months, there could be little justification for building permanent storage, so the dump in the Savernake Forest was extended to include American armaments. Much of this material came into Britain through the ports on the west coast, mainly on the Clyde. As the movement of the extra tonnage would far outstrip the ability of the goods yard at Marlborough to handle it, so a separate RRT installation was built, closer to the dump.

Prior to 1933, there was a single-track branch line of the Great Western Railway (GWR) from Savernake to a high-level terminus at Marlborough. There was also a double-track of the former Midland & South Western Junction Railway (MSWJR) from Ludgershall through Grafton and Savernake to Marlborough Low Level Station, from where the line continued as single track on through to Swindon. After both routes became the property of the Great Western Railway in 1924, some rationalisation of the parallel routes between Savernake and Marlborough became almost inevitable, and in March 1933 the MSWJR double line south of Marlborough was converted into two single lines. Part of the former GWR branch was taken out of use and the remainder slued to align with the former MSWJR 'Up' line, thus allowing trains from Savernake to run into Marlborough Low Level Station. Between the slue and Marlborough Low Level there were therefore two parallel single lines. The former GWR High Level Station in Marlborough was reduced in status to that of a goods depot.

The railway system in the area was further complicated during the war years when engineering work became essential in the tunnel (south of Marlborough station) which had been cut through unstable chalk. To give the engineers space to operate, and to allow for an engineering siding in the tunnel, only one of the two single lines through the tunnel was available for traffic from July 1944 until August 1946. This restriction, on what during the war years was a busy railway line (open for 24 hours each day), had to be kept as short as possible. Signal boxes were constructed at either end of the tunnel, that at the eastern end controlling the convergence of the two parallel lines.



JULY 7, 1945

To serve the ammunition depot, a new siding was provided in August 1943 connecting with the Marlborough to Grafton South junction line north of the slue. Like many of the RRT installations, the military sidings at North Savernake consisted of two rail lines with hardstandings on either side to allow access by lorries, the concrete reputedly being poured on a base of old ammunition boxes to build up the level. These sidings, each with a capacity to accommodate 53 wagons, were constructed in a slight hollow in the side of the hill, about 250 yards from the main rail line and a few feet above it. Between the sidings and the main line there were three reception sidings. At the southernmost end lay a set of points making the connection with the main line. Adjacent to the north end of the reception sidings was the hut for the Railway Transport Officer (RTO), an Army man tasked to deal with liaison with the railway company. The RTO hut was equipped with a selective ringing phone on the railway circuit.

The ammunition was manhandled from the railway wagons (open ones were often used, generally sheeted over) to the lorries, and unloaded again by hand at the storage site. There were few concessions to mechanisation though there were some roller conveyors along which ammunition boxes and crates could be pushed. Large shells had to be unloaded individually.

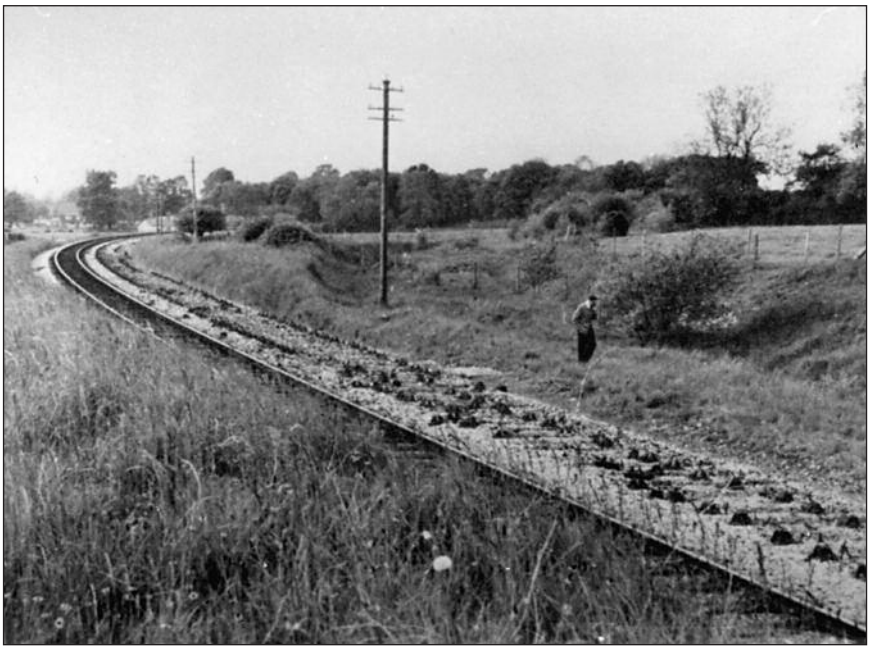
The extensive handling meant that there was an ever-present risk of accidents though there were surprisingly few mishaps compared with the volume of ammunition handled, often in cold and inhospitable conditions.

The first notable incident at Savernake Forest took place on Saturday, July 7, 1945. Just before half past four in the afternoon there was a series of small explosions. Mrs Gent at the Warren Farm started to phone the police and the National Fire Service (NFS), her call to Marlborough being timed at 4.28 p.m. As Mrs Gent was on the telephone there was a major explosion. Part of the farmhouse fell down around her but, despite a wound to her head, she completed her emergency call. Her husband was out haymaking and was uninjured. As she was taken to hospital to receive stitches to her head, Mrs Gent noticed that four nearby dwellings were more or less damaged. Four people were detained in Savernake hospital overnight, including George Phillips who lived in a nearby cottage and was cut by flying glass. Portions of the roof of St. Katherine's Church, and some of the stained glass windows, were damaged. At the vicarage, windows and china were smashed, and doors broken.

Four men were in a passing truck. The civilian driver went along to see what had happened, just as an explosion occurred. A piece of flying shell hit an American soldier in the truck and killed him — the other two men in the truck counted themselves lucky to have escaped. But the loss of life could have been greater as close by was an office used by the American Army which was often busy on weekdays.

The men from the NFS at Marlborough turned out at 4.30 p.m. but were stopped by the military short of the burning munitions. It was just as well, for there were two subsequent major explosions. The firemen withdrew to a quarter of a mile from the fires, and helped with the task of placing red flags to mark unexploded shells that had been thrown around. They were joined by men from Ludgershall, Tidworth, Bedwyn and Swindon, and were accommodated overnight in tents in the grounds of Tottenham House, which had itself suffered windows broken by the blasts. At 7 a.m. on Sunday morning, they were allowed back to cool down the remains of the fires and make temporary repairs to the roofs of damaged houses.

HQ Salisbury Plain and Dorset District responded quickly to the emergency, and 82 men from the 8th Battalion, Devonshire Regiment, stationed at Bulford, were sent as soon as the news of the incident was received. When they arrived, grass and trees were burning, and there was clear danger of further explosions. The men closed off the adjacent roads, and started using their lorries to evacuate the people whose homes had been affected. The civilians were taken to a nearby café. The Devons then worked into the night to recover their furniture. Warren Farm, only 200 yards from the principal explosion (it was saved from demolition by sturdy construction some 200 years before) was badly damaged, but the Army recovered a lot of the farmer's possessions and took him, and the farmhands who lived in adjacent cottages, to stay with friends. An Emergency Control Post was set up in Tottenham House, manned by representatives of Army HQ, the Acting Chief Constable of Wiltshire and the Chief Regional Fire Officer, No. 7 Region. A military telephone was brought in, the whole being organised by a detachment of Military Police. After 24 hours, US Army guards arrived to take over.



The location where the Savernake Forest depot's reception sidings (in the hollow visible behind the gentleman in the middle of the picture) connected with the main line. By the time this photo was taken in the early 1960s, the main line had been lifted at this point leaving just a row of old rail chairs, though the single-track branch from Marlborough to Savernake Low Level Station was still in place.

The process of handling munitions in storage areas spread through acres of trees did not lend itself to much mechanisation. Almost the only mechanical equipment available was manually-operated roller ramps. On a cold spring day in March 1944, troops of the 3276th Quartermaster Service Company load ammunition boxes on to a lorry. (USNA)

JANUARY 2, 1946

On Wednesday, January 2, 1946, the sidings at North Savernake contained 100 wagons — just about the maximum capacity — all but ten being fully loaded. The depot was very busy at this time, dealing with ammunition being returned from Europe, and in No. 1 Mileage Siding were 51 open wagons of inwards traffic from Newport, Monmouthshire, containing British ammunition. The sheets had been removed from the 17 wagons nearest the buffers and by the end of the day ten had been unloaded. There were 39 wagons on No. 2 Mileage Siding (34 opens and 5 vans) in the process of being loaded with outward traffic for Silloth. The load consisted of American ammunition, anti-tank and anti-personnel mines and some German mines. (A large amount of German ammunition was shipped to Britain after the war for storage pending destruction by burning or dumping at sea.) At the reception yard end of No. 2 Mileage Siding were another ten sheeted open wagons which had recently arrived from Newport.

The normal method of working was that four or five pioneers would load and unload from the road lorries under the supervision of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps (RAOC), controlled by an NCO, and in overall charge that day was Staff Sergeant Sydney Rogerson. Towards late afternoon, the work was concentrated in completing the loading of the wagons for Silloth.

Despite the fact that the RRT sidings were full of wagons, more were in transit. A freight train had left Alexandra Dock Junction yard (Newport, South Wales) at 3 a.m. that morning, routed via the wartime line around Westbury. The crew were relieved at Heywood Road Junction (Westbury) and Engineman A. C. Pickett, Fireman S. E. Griggs and Goods Guard L. Biggs took over. The train left Heywood Road at 12.40 p.m. and proceeded to Savernake. At Wolfhall Junction the train went into the exchange sidings to be divided up as 58 wagons were more than the engine could haul up the gradient to North Savernake. Twenty-five wagons were detached and the remaining 33 remarshalled to be taken forward. The train then proceeded via Grafton South Junction (in order to get on to the former MSWJR 'Down' line) where it reversed direction for the short run, undertaken tender-first, up to the depot siding.

At North Savernake, Acting Shunter A. C. S. Baldry from Marlborough was waiting in the RTO's hut. With him were Acting Checker (Motor Driver) Harold Moore and R. N. Newbury, the station master at Marlborough, who had come out to oversee the arrival of the train. At about 2.35 p.m., the signalman at Marlborough Tunnel East telephoned with news that the first part of the train was leaving Grafton South. With daylight beginning to fade, Baldry went to the bottom of the reception sidings, met the train, and operated the points to let it into the reception siding. Baldry left the points on the main line set towards the yard for it was his intention to send the engine and brake van straight back to Grafton South to collect the second portion of the special. (He had to be smart about it because it was now 2.45 p.m. and he would have known that a freight train was at Marlborough and was due to depart at 2.20 p.m. If the freight train was delayed, it would in turn hold up the school trains.)

Engineman Pickett eased the special up No. 1 Reception Siding to stop near the Railway Transport Officer's hut. Baldry uncoupled the engine from the train and, as Pickett was easing it forward clear of the points prior to running back down an empty line, the first explosion occurred. It was 2.50 p.m. He immediately ran the engine back into No. 2 Reception Siding and halted beside the hut.

Handling of munitions was essentially a labour-intensive activity. Here a soldier of the 3276th Quartermaster Service Company transfers ammunition in cases from a road truck to a rail wagon at Marlborough station. The rail van belonged to the London & North Eastern Railway and is branded to carry fruit traffic only. During the war, all railway wagons were 'pooled' under government control and so could be used at any time for any journey, which considerably simplified wagon control. (USNA)

The morning after! An aerial view of the site of the explosions at Savernake, viewed from the south. The locations of the principal explosions are evident. The lateral blast carried ammunition boxes substantial distances into the fields adjacent to the railway. The basic layout of the road/rail transfer (RRT) area can be seen at the top of the picture — two rail sidings with concrete hardstanding either side. It is notable that very few of the wagons in the sidings were closed vans. At this time, as during the war, most of the ammunition was handled in open wagons with tarpaulins to cover the munitions if necessary.

THE FIRST EXPLOSION

In the aftermath of what then followed, it was not possible to be sure what caused the first explosion: whether it took place in a lorry or rail wagon. The fact that a train had just arrived was a pure coincidence. As a result of an explosion on or adjacent to No. 2 Mileage Siding, the men working in a lorry were badly injured, and three wagons standing on the siding instantly caught fire.

Sergeant Rogerson ran to where the explosion had taken place which was between the middle of the siding and the reception sidings end. His immediate concern was for his men and, despite the small explosions from burning ammunition around him, and assisted by Sergeant Doug Kay and Corporal Alf Adams, he managed to rescue a wounded man who was removed from the danger area. At the same time, he sent Privates Fred Barnett and Dave Gallagher down to the RTO's office to ask that the engine pull the undamaged wagons on the adjacent siding out of the way.

They met Newberry and Moore who immediately made arrangements with the engine crew. Baldry, realising that the plan to take the engine straight back to Grafton South was aborted, went down and changed the points. Meanwhile Moore was signalling the engine onto the wagons whereupon he coupled it up. However, the engine was unable to get the 51 wagons moving because a number of them had their hand-brakes on. Despite the risk from the burning wagons on the adjacent siding, Moore, assisted by Barnett and Gallagher, went along and started to release the brakes. The engine crew waited anxiously because, as the engine was facing rearwards towards the seat of the explosion, they were very vulnerable standing on the open footplate.

When enough brakes had been released, the train started to move but Fireman Griggs immediately noticed that one of the wagons that they were pulling was now on fire. Moore went back a second time and uncoupled at a point three wagons from the one that was alight. The 14 wagons still coupled to the engine were then drawn into No. 2 Reception Siding to be met by Baldry. Since it was clear that the engine could do no more to help, he uncoupled it from the wagons and took the engine to the south end of the reception sidings to couple it to the brake van and await the opportunity to leave.

While all this was going on, additional Army support arrived. Sergeant James Matthews was with the first fire tender. Ignoring the risk, he promptly uncoupled six wagons on No. 2 Mileage Siding despite the fact that one was already on fire. Together with his crew, he then started to work on the fires and persisted until the water ran out.

By now, Major Kenneth Biggs, the commander of the Sub Depot, had reached the spot and, with the help of Sergeant Kay, he pushed the uncoupled wagons away from the main blaze before putting out the fire in a wagon containing 5.5-inch shells. Sergeant Kay then helped others to partially empty a wagon of mines to create a fire-break and carried on with this until driven back by the encroaching cordite fire. The guard Biggs attempted to organise the creation of further fire-breaks, while Driver Baker began moving four 3-ton lorries to clear the way for the fire tenders. The NFS from Marlborough and Ludgershall arrived promptly but were hampered by having to go down the hill to the canal at Burbage Wharf to refill with water.

Looking towards the buffer stops at the end of the sidings, ammunition boxes and unexploded shells litter the site. The crater from one of the explosions has destroyed the railway track in the westernmost of the two Mileage Sidings. The wartime standard concrete sleeper was formed with a slot in the centre to reduce the overall weight and also the volume of materials required. However this created a risk of breaking the sleeper at this point so ballast was not pushed under the centre of the sleeper, thus creating a 'V' down the centre of the tracks. In the background the lighting masts remained undamaged, but in the foreground are the remains of one of the poles, shattered into several pieces by the force of the explosion. (Royal Logistic Corps Museum)

The first explosion had been clearly heard at Marlborough station. Ganger N. F. Noah went to the signal box at the station and spoke with Relief Signalman L. C. Ham. They agreed that it seemed likely that the explosion had taken place at North Savernake siding which worried Ganger Noah Trotman because he had men working there. Ham telephoned the RTO's hut and received confirmation of the explosion. At Ham's request, Trotman then boarded the engine of the midday freight train which was waiting at Marlborough and rode with the train to examine the line to North Savernake. It was important to establish quickly whether it was obstructed, not least because in less than an hour the schoolchildren would be arriving for their trains home.

At North Savernake, Trotman found his men whom he ordered away to a place of safety before walking up the yard to meet Newberry. The station master had already telephoned Control to report the explosion and he now phoned again to say that Trotman had reported the line clear. Despite the fact that the depot sidings were some 250 yards from the running lines, the control office remained very concerned and asked Newberry to find out from the Army whether there was a risk of further explosions. In the meantime, Trotman walked back towards Marlborough along the main line.

From swords into ploughshares. The epicentre of the blast now transformed into storage units for Park Farm.

This vehicle is only recognisable as an open wagon of the Great Western Railway from details such as the brake handle. The force of the explosion has comprehensively damaged the steelwork of the wagon and also shattered the rails in the foreground, which have been thrown several yards from the track. (Royal Logistic Corps Museum)

SUBSEQUENT EXPLOSIONS

By now appliances from the NFS from Andover, Swindon, Devizes and Pewsey were arriving in force but, as the crews were working towards the centre of the fire, a second explosion — more destructive than the first — occurred, blowing several wagons apart and showering the firemen with debris. Some were hurt and a leading fireman from Ludgershall sustained a fractured shoulder. Major Biggs went forward alone to inspect the scene of the explosion and decided that the fire would have to be left to burn itself out.

Newberry left the site at the same time as the military officers, still without a decision as to whether the trains should be stopped. The NFS withdrew, their vehicles being used to assist in the evacuation of civilians from houses over quite a wide area, save for an 80-year-old couple at Cadley who refused to move despite being able to hear the roaring of the cordite-fed fire!

Walking along the main line — and when about halfway back to Marlborough — Trotman heard the sound of this second explosion. Just then the first of the two school trains, the Cheltenham to Andover passenger which had left Marlborough at 3.50 p.m., came slowly down the line, the driver shouting to Trotman to ask whether it was safe to proceed. Trotman gave him the OK and then decided to ride back to the North Savernake siding on the engine of the 4 p.m. branch train. Just before it reached there a third large explosion was heard. The train was unscathed but Trotman got off to examine the track for any damage.

This third explosion, which like the second had blown a large crater, finally convinced the military that they would have to accept responsibility for the decision to halt rail traffic. It was certainly the largest of the whole series of explosions, though smaller blasts were to continue late into the night. The sound was heard for 20 miles around and a crate of glass which had that day been delivered to Masham, three miles away, was shattered.

Newberry was by now a long way from a railway phone so he was provided with military transport back to Marlborough station. On arrival, at 4.23 p.m. he stopped all rail traffic. This decision was to some extent academic because the second explosion (at about 4 p.m.) had taken out nearly a mile of telegraph lines.

Meanwhile, Guard Biggs and Shunter Baldry had gone over to the points after the 3.50 Marlborough to Andover school train had passed through, ready to obtain a key that would allow them to unlock the points. While they were waiting, the second explosion occurred, nearly blowing Baldry off his feet. They were still trying to get the electrical release for the key when a third explosion occurred. Clods of earth and a rain of splinters fell around them. The engine of the special was now trapped in the reception sidings so Baldry stayed with the crew at the south end of the sidings, awaiting developments.

'Down' direction trains were now halted at Marlborough and returned to Swindon, while 'Up' trains from Andover were diverted into Savernake Low Level Station and turned round there. Between Savernake and Marlborough, passengers were conveyed by road in three single-decker buses hired from the Bristol Tramways and Carriage Company but, because the direct route through the forest had been closed by the Army soon after the first explosion, the buses had to go by way of the Pewsey and Hungerford roads.

As Checker Moore could be of no further assistance at the sidings he got on his bicycle and rode to the Army headquarters to direct an ambulance to where an injured man had been taken for safety. He then sought out Mrs Newberry and Mrs Baldry to assure them that their husbands were safe.

Since Relief Signalman Ham at Marlborough had a motorbike, District Inspector Cotterill sent him to the Grafton South signal box. Special permission had to be negotiated with the officer commanding the Army camp at Postern Hill for him to use the main road, which was not without danger since the road passed within a quarter of a mile of the fire. Ham arrived at Grafton South at 5.30 p.m.

At 6.15 p.m., Cotterill authorised him to take a key for the points up to North Savernake to release the trapped engine and its crew. Ham rode on his motorcycle to where the railway crossed over the road at Leigh Hill from where he walked up the railway. When he arrived at North Savernake, he handed the key to Baldry who immediately set the points to let the engine and brake van leave. It was now just after 7 p.m.

KILLED
283rd Company,
Pioneer Corps
Corporal Thomas Pickersgill
Private Joseph Fortnum
Private Harry Stevenson
Private Francis Whieldon
Private Kenneth Wilson

2nd Batallion,
Royal Army Ordnance Corps
Private Leslie Chick
Private Walter Meaker
Private John Sharples

The George Cross was awarded to Major Kenneth Biggs *(left)* **and Staff Sergeant Sidney Rogerson** *(right)*.

THE DAMAGE

The swift action of the men on the site in moving 14 loaded wagons out of the sidings; in creating fire-breaks; and in unloading some wagons, was effective in limiting the damage. Consequently, the destruction was confined to some 200 tons of explosives out of nearly 1,000 tons in the railway wagons.

The damage to the wagons was spectacular. Nine open wagons (four GWR, four LNER and one LMS) had disappeared completely, 17 more were described as totally wrecked and a further 14 were damaged.

At the nearby Park Farm, the farmer had carried on working for a while after the first explosion but when he saw the line of railway wagons on fire, he went inside and suggested that his wife and family go to her mother's house in Pewsey. Whilst on his way back, the second explosion occurred causing serious damage to the farmhouse and outbuildings. Three farmhands were about to milk 25 cows in the cow-shed. The blast caused part of the roof to collapse and debris showered onto the back of the cattle but fortunately neither they nor the farmhands were seriously injured.

The blast blew in windows at Kingstone Farm at Cadley, and spread a considerable distance. The town of Marlborough nestles in a deep valley. The shock wave passed above most of the buildings, but then did damage to the buildings at the top of the hill on the road leading towards Swindon, blowing doors open and damaging windows. Windows were broken as far north as the village of Ogbourne St George.

The following day, soldiers from the RAOC were on duty to stop the press and other visitors from approaching the site which was strewn with unexploded ordnance. Ganger Trotman inspected the main line by the light of day and found that the damage had been confined to the telegraph lines and a few hundred yards of fencing. There were also numerous pieces of debris scattered over the lines but by 11.15 a.m. the military declared it safe to use the railway again. The linemen were hard at work replacing the damaged wires and working was restored at 11.25 a.m. in time for the 10.10 from Southampton and 10.25 Cheltenham to run as booked.

At the seat of the explosion, some of the ammunition which was too unsafe to move was destroyed by controlled explosions in situ. Although local residents were allowed back into their homes on the afternoon of January 3, those living within a mile of the site were asked to leave their windows open (in midwinter!) so that they would not be damaged by the blast from the demolition explosions.

THE CASUALTIES

Although the first explosion was not as serious as those which followed, it was sufficient to throw most of the men off their feet, eight being caught by the full force of the blast. Five of those killed were from the 283rd Company, Pioneer Corps, and three from the 2nd Battalion, RAOC. Six more men were seriously injured and detained in hospital. Amongst the dead was Private Walter Meaker of the RAOC, aged 29, who had gone right through the war (including hazardous service in Italy) without a scratch, only to die in Britain the day before he was to be demobbed.

BRAVERY RECOGNISED

In due course, the heroism of that evening was recognised. Captain (acting Major) Kenneth Biggs and Staff Sergeant Sidney Rogerson, who had returned to their jobs as a bank official and a bus conductor respectively, were awarded the George Cross, and Sergeants Douglas Key and James Matthews the George Medal. Corporal Alfred Adams, Driver Arthur Baker, and Privates Frederick Barnett, David Gallagher and John Prendergast received the British Empire Medal. Twenty-seven other personnel received Mentions in Dispatches. Captain (acting Major) Biggs was also awarded the Bronze Star by the US Army in recognition of the fact that much of the munitons saved that day belonged to the US Army.

The courage of the men from the National Fire Service also received reward. The medals awarded were:

Marlborough Station: Company Officer Joe Brain, the George Medal; Section Leader F. Green and Fireman Frank Brennan, the MBE. Ludgershall Station: Section Leader Cecil Vane, the George Medal and Fireman Lawrence Beaves, the MBE.

The railwaymen who risked danger were not forgotten and Messrs Baldry, Griggs, Moore, Newberry and Pickett all got honourable mentions and personal letters of thanks from the C-in-C Southern Command. Moore was also awarded the British Empire Medal and Pickett and Griggs the King's Commendation for Brave Conduct.

The GWR showed its appreciation in tangible form. Gratuities of ten guineas were paid to Acting Checker Moore, Engineman Pickett and Fireman Griggs. Five guineas each went to Station Master Newberry, Ganger Trotman, Acting Shunter Baldry and Relief Signalman Ham. There was a small presentation ceremony at Paddington.

LATER YEARS AT SAVERNAKE

For a few years after the end of the war, Savernake Forest remained an important ammunition depot. The public were still only allowed to use the main roads through the forest, and the GWR station master had to be issued with a pass to allow him to enter the forested area. Two shunters were kept permanently employed at North Savernake sidings to handle the traffic, the RTO's hut being their base.

A few months after the explosions, the Permanent Way Inspector decided that the military sidings would have to be closed temporarily, pending repairs to the track which had got into a poor state. At this time, the depot in the forest was being cleared, two trains per week being required to transport unwanted ordnance to Barry docks for dumping at sea. To keep the traffic flowing, these consignments were transferred from Army lorries to rail wagon in the yard at Marlborough. The Army handled all road transport, the loading, and sheeting of wagons, the railwaymen dealing only with the shunting and labelling.

The connection into North Savernake military sidings was formally taken out of use on July 28, 1950.

THE CAUSE

At the time of the explosion, the men were working on munitions to go to Silloth for dumping at sea. If they were packed in wooden boxes it was a potential problem because sometimes they would not sink. An engineer who visited the sidings on the day of the explosion noticed that to get over this, the men were drilling holes in the boxes. The explosion happened late in the day, with the light failing. The men would have been tired and under pressure to get the train loaded so that it could leave to make space for the incoming loads that were already in transit from the South Wales ports. So did the men accidentally create an explosion by drilling into a piece of ordnance?

At the subsequent inquiry, the Commandant of Corsham CAD explained that although it was not possible to determine the internal condition of the German munitions, most probably they were the likely cause of the accident. The local Member of Parliament expressed outrage that potentially dangerous German ammunition should be in the country at all!

However, it could all have been a lot worse. When the sidings at North Savernake were full, it was a common practice to do the road-rail transfers in the goods yard at Marlborough, adjacent to the town. Fortunately, the plans were changed at the last minute.

Wing Commander Adrian Warburton was one of the RAF's most distinguished pilots of the Second World War. Flying photo-reconnaissance missions from Malta, he never failed to come back with the photographs needed and became legendary for his exploits and derring-do. Air Chief Marshall Sir Arthur Tedder called him 'the most valuable pilot in the RAF'. Unconventional, dashingly good-looking and absolutely fearless, he won the DSO and Bar, DFC and two Bars, and the American DFC, making him the RAF's most decorated pilot of the war. In April 1944, at the age of 26, he mysteriously vanished during a mission over Germany.

ADRIAN WARBURTON: RAF PHOTO-RECCE ACE

By Robin J. Brooks

One of the unsung air aces of the Second World War flew not fighters but photo-reconnaissance aircraft from Malta. A rather flamboyant character, his name was Adrian Warburton, more commonly known as 'Warby'. He was a non-conformist to service life yet such was his impact on the island of Malta that he is remembered there with affection even today. When he disappeared without a trace during a sortie from Britain in April 1944, his death shook many of his colleagues and islanders alike for they all thought him invincible.

Born on March 10, 1918 at Middlesborough, the son of a famous Royal Navy submarine commander, Warburton was educated at St Edward's School in Oxford and entered the RAF in late 1938 via a short service commission. He began his flying training at No. 10 Elementary & Reserve Flying Training School at Prestwick progressing to No. 8 Flying Training School at Hullavington in January 1939. Although initially trained as a navigator, he later became a pilot, flying various types of aircraft. However, his instructors were not over-impressed, assessing him as 'average' or 'below average'.

On October 28, 1939, while he was still undergoing training, Warburton somewhat impulsively married Eileen (or Betty as she was called) Mitchell, an aspiring beauty queen seven years his senior who worked in a pub at Southsea in Hampshire near his training unit. However, he seems to have been a little too immature to cope with a grown-up relationship and almost immediately abandoned her, continuing to live in the mess and trying to avoid her as much as possible. He did not tell the RAF about his marriage, and always named his father as next-of-kin.

When he passed out from training he joined No. 22 Squadron, a torpedo-bomber unit flying obsolescent Vildebeestes. His love of Malta began when part of No. 22 Squadron was transferred to that island.

It was on September 6, 1940, that Flight Lieutenant E. A. 'Tich' Whiteley arrived in Malta with a flight of three Glenn Martin Marylands converted to carry out long-range photo-reconnaissance duties. Originally known as the Martin 167W, this aircraft had been designed as a fast attack bomber. Unsuccessful in obtaining a production order for American squadrons, it had been offered for export. The French government had taken up a contract but only a few aircraft had been delivered by the time the French Air Force surrendered in June 1940. The remainder were diverted to Britain and given the name Maryland. First examples were shipped to Liverpool in June 1940 for assembly at the Burtonwood Repair Depot. Few remained in England, the majority being flown or shipped to the Middle East with the exception of three of the Mk Is which found their way to Malta with 'Tich' Whiteley.

In October 1939, at the age of 21, Warburton married Betty Mitchell, a divorcee of 28 whom he had met in a pub near his training base. However, wedlock was more than the young trainee pilot could cope with and the marriage never got off the ground.

Upon their arrival on Malta, the three Marylands were stationed at Luqa, the main RAF base on the island (see *After the Battle* No. 10), and tasked with photographing anything that moved and anywhere that belonged to the Axis powers. On September 19 the three aircraft were formed into a separate unit, No. 431 Flight.

Pilot Officer Warburton had only flown the Maryland on a few occasions and the type proved quite a handful. In the beginning and during the conversion period, the aircraft caused Warburton a lot of frustration, even to the point of him nearly writing one off. Eventually the aircraft was tamed but it was no secret that the Maryland was certainly not a great favourite with him.

When Warby, as he was now known, began flying reconnaissance missions with the Maryland, he introduced a new practice of going down to at least 100 feet in order to take the clearest and best pictures possible. Some of his efforts produced the largest-scale photographs ever taken of individual targets, something that would have appeared impossible by ordinary standards. To him, even zero feet was not good enough if conditions were bad.

Although it was strictly against the rules for photo-reconnaissance aircraft to attack enemy aircraft, on October 30, during one of their earliest missions, Warburton and his crew shot down an Italian Z506B seaplane. Three days later, however, they nearly fell victim in turn to an attack by four Italian aircraft. Warburton was hit by a spent bullet which caused no serious injury but did render him unconscious. His navigator, Sergeant Frank Bastard, took control and managed to keep the aircraft airborne until Warburton had recovered sufficiently. (Bastard was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal.)

On December 24, Warburton and his crew were on a mission to photograph the Italian base at Naples. This was the first of his 'beard singeing' missions and one in which his gunner, Sergeant Paddy Moren, got a kill. Leaving Luqa, Warburton crossed the Mediterranean and was approaching the Bay of Naples at around 1,500 feet when he saw a brown-camouflaged Savoia-Marchetti 79 bomber flying a parallel track to him. Noticing that there was a band of cloud some 2,000 feet above him into which he could retire if enemy fighters appeared, Warburton commenced a stern attack on the Italian bomber. He fired and noticed pieces of the tail fly off and several hits on the fuselage. Closing the range, he concentrated on the starboard engine which had begun to smoke. With Moren pleading to let him have a go as well, Warburton drew alongside the enemy as Paddy fired about 20 rounds which hit the petrol tanks. Immediately the SM79 burst into flames and dived into the sea. Warburton then carried on with his reconnaissance of Naples as if nothing unusual had happened.

As the Italian raids on Malta increased in intensity and frequency (see *After the Battle* No. 10), so the demand for good photos became a priority. The Gulf of Taranto and the Italian fleet stationed there became top of this list. For some time the Royal Navy, and in particular the Fleet Air Arm, had wanted to attack this fleet before it could put to sea and become a major threat to Allied convoys. The attack was originally planned for October 21 — Trafalgar Day — but due to other requirements, it was postponed until November 11, the anniversary of Armistice Day.

By September 1940, Warburton was in Malta serving with No. 431 Flight. This is his Maryland, AR733, pictured at Luqa airfield.

It was essential that photos were first obtained to show the quantity and position of the ships and the brunt of this duty fell upon No. 431 Flight. From November 8, Warburton began to photograph the Italian ships in Taranto. On November 10, again over the target, he and his crew spotted a major concentration of battleships and cruisers in the harbour but, just at that moment, their cameras failed to work. However, braving a hail of anti-aircraft fire, Warburton came down to 50 feet, flying around the harbour not once, but twice, while his navigator on this flight, Sergeant John Spires, scribbled down the names and types of vessels as they were shouted from the cockpit. They were flying so low that, when they arrived back at Luqa at 1610 hours, the crew found remains of a ship's aerial trailing from their tail-wheel! More importantly, Warburton was able to confirm that there were five battleships, 14 cruisers and 27 destroyers at anchor, along with details of their precise position in the harbour. Armed with this information, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean Fleet, decided on a night attack by Swordfish from the carrier *Illustrious*. Warburton was tasked with conducting the last reconnaissance mission on November 11, immediately prior to the attack being launched. His high-level photographs were collected by a Fleet Air Arm Fulmar from the *Illustrious* and flown directly to the carrier force where they were used to brief the Swordfish crews.

That night, 21 torpedo-carrying Swordfish took off from the *Illustrious* which was lying 180 miles east of Taranto. The key element was surprise and for the loss of two Swordfish, half of the Italian Fleet was put out of action. Early next morning, Warburton was again airborne to obtain photo coverage of the damage. His pictures showed three battleships destroyed, one cruiser hit, two destroyers damaged and several lesser vessels sunk. All of this plus the devastation of the seaplane base made it a very successful raid.

Warburton rose to instant fame in November 1940 when he daringly reconnoitred and photographed Taranto harbour in southern Italy in preparation for the Royal Navy's surprise attack on the Italian fleet lying at anchor there. Over a period of several days, Warburton flew several sorties to the target, taking both high-level vertical photographs and, on one occasion, even diving down to deck level to visually observe the position of the Italian ships. *Left*: The harbour pictured by Warburton on the eve of the attack . . . and on the morning after the raid *(right)*.

Left: **Whilst in Malta, although officially still married to Betty Westcott, Warburton fell in love with Christina Ratcliffe, a dancer in one of the variety troupes entertaining the troops in Malta. This picture of her was taken after she had begun work as a plotter in Malta's Fighter Control operations room in the underground rock shelters at Lascaris.** *Right:* **Christina's troupe was known as the 'Whizz Bangs', and usually performed as part of a larger RAF concert party known as the 'Flying Gang'. All of the girls were serving as plotters at Lascaris. In January 1943, AFPU photographer Lieutenant J. Deakin photographed them practicing dance routines on the roof of the house of the Captain of their watch. Christina is second from left. (IWM)**

The victory increased the Navy's freedom of action in the Mediterranean thus allowing several capital ships to be deployed in other areas of war. That the photos obtained by Warburton and others had played a significant part in the operation was confirmed by a letter which Admiral Cunningham wrote to Air Commodore F. H. M. Maynard, the AOC Malta, on November 14:

'My dear Maynard,

I hasten to write you a line to thank you for the most valuable reconnaissance work carried out by your squadrons, without which the successful attack on Taranto would have been impossible. I well know what long monotonous flying time they have had to put in and I am very grateful to them. The work over Taranto has been particularly valuable and gave us all we wanted to know. Good luck and my grateful thanks again for your co-operation.

Yours very sincerely,

A. B. Cunningham.'

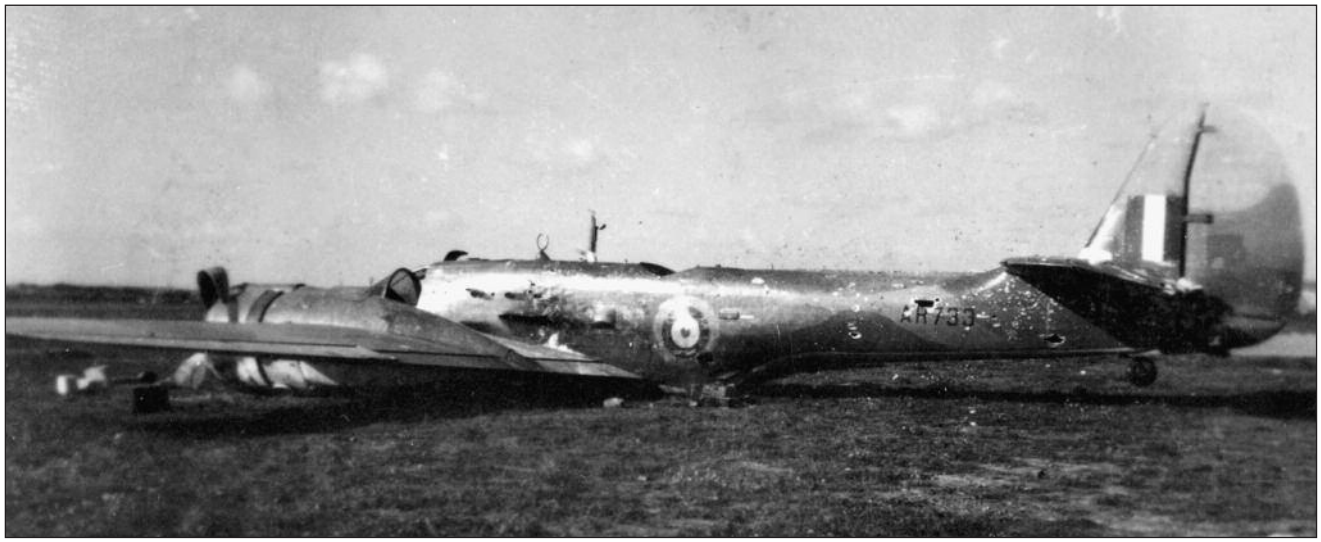
Meanwhile, Warburton and his crew continued with their photo-recce missions. In early January 1941, 'Ultra' decrypts revealed that the Luftwaffe was concentrating aircraft in Sicily and southern Italy. Warburton was sent to investigate and his photos, taken on January 5 over Sicilian airfields such as Trapani, Gela and Comiso, not only confirmed the presence of German fighters and bombers there but were also used to brief RAF crews for a concerted raid on these fields by Malta-based bombers on January 13.

Three days earlier, on January 10, No. 431 Flight at Luqa had been expanded to form No. 69 Squadron, being assigned a full complement of 12 Marylands and ten Beauforts. (Actual increase of strength took some time: February and March saw only five replacement Marylands arrive; in April the squadron acquired two modified Hurricanes; and the first Beauforts did not arrive until August 1941.) The new squadron status however brought further demands on photo reconnaissance as missions were carried out over Libya as well as Sicily and Italy. With this increased workload came Warburton's promotion to Flying Officer and the award of his first DFC. However, it all had little effect on his attitude towards established service attire and he still continued to wear very unconventional RAF dress consisting of an army battle-dress, Oxford bags and a pair of suede shoes. Round his neck he wore a silk cravat, as he said 'to absorb the sweat of the Maltese sun'.

While on the island, Warburton became friendly with a cabaret dancer from Cheshire by the name of Christina Ratcliffe. When the war broke out in Malta, she had been leading a dance troupe doing shows in Valletta. With the bombing the clubs closed and the girls were virtually out of a job. They decided to entertain the troops on Malta and it was at a party after one such show that she met Warburton. The attraction was immediate and mutual, and there developed a relationship that was to portray them as the symbol of defiance on the island. A series of photos were taken of them together and published in the *Illustrated* of January 1943 and other magazines of the time in Britain. These helped to tell the world that the morale of the people on Malta whilst under intense attacks was certainly very high. (Warburton's wife Betty in England was still sending him letters but he ignored them all and in time she served him divorce papers which he managed to dodge as well.)

Meanwhile, he and his crew carried on with their reconnaissance missions. Another outstanding day was February 9, 1941, when they photographed the area around the Tragino aqueduct in the Apennine mountains of southern Italy for Operation 'Colossus'. In what was Britain's first-ever airborne operation, a small force of 38 men — 'X' Troop — were to be dropped by parachute, blow up this aqueduct and then make their way to Italy's west coast to be picked up by a submarine (see *After the Battle* No. 81). Warburton took photos of the target site flying as low as 50 feet whilst under intense fire from the ground, and also obtained a complete strip from the target to the coast. The results were of such clarity that they proved of the

'Warby' and Christina appeared in several official photo shoots designed to bolster public morale about Malta's ability to hold on. In November 1942, the pair featured in a photo report about the visit of two American sailors to the island. The contemporary caption reads: 'Another thing that made the sailors' day was meeting Wing Commander Adrian Warburton, DSO, DFC with two Bars. He is the ace pilot on the island and his feats are legendary.' When this picture was taken Warburton had just returned from his latest exploit when he had to force-land at Bône in French Algeria. He returned after a few days, having first borrowed an aircraft from the French to fly to Gibraltar and then shot down a Ju 88 on the way back to Malta! (IWM)



In April 1941, Warburton and his crew had a narrow escape when their Maryland was mistakenly attacked by RAF Hurricanes. AR733 was badly shot up, especially in the tail, but Warburton managed to belly-land her safely at Luqa.

utmost help to the airborne troops. The raid, launched on the night of February 10/11, was successful in that the aqueduct was destroyed, but none of the paras managed to reach the submarine pick-up point, every one of them being taken prisoner by the Italians. When news of their capture reached Warburton and No. 69 Squadron, everyone felt it as a personal loss.

In April 1941, Warburton and his crew crash-landed in Malta after being mistakenly intercepted by RAF Hurricanes. Throughout their tour, they continued to engage enemy aircraft so that by mid-1941 they had become the top-scoring aces on the island with seven confirmed kills and several more damaged. Although, as said, it was strictly forbidden for reconnaissance aircraft to go chasing the enemy, the Air Officer Commanding Malta at this time, Air Vice-Marshal Hugh Pughe Lloyd, was more than happy to turn a blind eye to this slight bending of the rules. Anything that damaged the enemy was fair game to him, so much so that over the period of 1940 to 1941, 14 enemy aircraft fell to the guns of the Marylands.

No. 69 Squadron's original CO, Squadron Leader 'Tich' Whiteley, left on June 4, 1941, having seen the unit through its most trying times. He was succeeded by Squadron Leader R. D. Welland but by July he had been replaced by Squadron Leader E. Tennant.

On September 9, Warburton was awarded his second Distinguished Flying Cross and that same month ended his first operational tour on Malta. His last sortie also proved a great success when, with his regular crew of Sergeants Frank Bastard and Paddy Moren, he shot down an Italian Macchi 200 bringing their score to eight. On October 1 they all left for Egypt.

At Heliopolis, Warburton joined No. 2 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit (PRU), flying the Bristol Beaufighter in 'T' Flight. After the Maryland, he felt that this was the perfect aircraft for the type of missions that he flew. Though not as hectic or as dangerous as flying in Malta, his time in Egypt was spent flying photographic sorties over the other islands in the Mediterranean. As early as late 1941, preparations were begun for future Allied offensive operations. The success of such ventures would depend largely on regular photographic reconnaissance of enemy dispositions in the Mediterranean, notably in Sicily. It therefore became the job of No. 2 PRU to photograph all the possible beach landing sites, Axis defences and radar sites on that island. With Malta being the closest Allied landmass to Sicily, two Beaufighters -– one of them flown by Warburton — left Heliopolis bound for Malta on December 29.

The arrival of Warburton back on the island was very welcome, not only to Christina of course, but also to Air-Vice Marshal Hugh Lloyd, now the RAF Commander Mediterranean, who had come to treat him as a son. With him he had a new crew of Corporal Norman Shirley and LAC Ron Hadden, both experienced photographers. His new mount was Beaufighter T4705 and, whilst he found it an excellent aircraft, he was disappointed that it was unarmed and that therefore he could no longer engage the enemy. There was however still plenty of excitement as he flew sorties over familiar territory such as Taranto, Tripoli and Sicily.

For Christina, it seemed as though he had never been away. While still doing cabaret for the troops in a dance group called the 'Whizz Bangs', she had now become a plotter in the underground operations room at Lascaris, deep in the rock beneath Valletta. Once more, her home became a place where Warburton could unwind and forget the rigours of war for a few hours and there is no doubt that she proved a tower of strength to him.

In March 1942 Warburton, having already won a DFC and one Bar, was awarded the DSO, the citation reading: 'This officer has carried out many missions each of which has demanded the highest degree of courage and skill. On one occasion whilst carrying out a reconnaissance of Taranto, Flight Lieutenant Warburton made two attempts to penetrate the harbour, although as there was much low cloud this entailed flying at a height of 50 feet over an enemy battleship. In spite of the failure of his port engine and repeated attacks from enemy aircraft he completed his mission and made a safe return. On another occasion he obtained photographs of Tripoli in spite of enemy fighter controls over the harbour. In March 1942, Flight Lieutenant Warburton carried out a reconnaissance of Palermo and obtained photographs revealing the damage caused by our attacks. This officer never failed to obtain photographs from a very low altitude, regardless of enemy opposition. His work has been most valuable and he has displayed great skill and tenacity.' (IWM)

In early 1943, Red Army Colonel Solodovnik visited Malta, the first Soviet officer to do so during the island's Blitz. His tour programme included a meeting with Warburton, by now a wing commander with the DSO, DFC and two Bars. (IWM)

By this time, early 1942, Malta was in desperate trouble. Food was short, fuel was almost non-existent and ammunition for the shore guns was restricted at a time when it was most needed. A convoy sent in January failed to arrive and a March convoy was so badly mauled by the enemy that only three merchant ships arrived. As they were about to unload in Grand Harbour, the Luftwaffe appeared overhead and systematically attempted to destroy what was left. For the islanders it was the beginning of what nearly turned out to be the end of Malta.

In March 1942, newly-promoted Flight Lieutenant Warburton was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and was told to return to Egypt for a rest period. He flew to Haifa for two weeks' leave and then returned to Heliopolis where he continued his duties with No. 2 PRU. Whilst there, he had the opportunity of flying a Spitfire for the first time and he instinctively knew that this was the ideal aircraft for photography. His sorties took him to Greece and once again back over Crete, all familiar territory to him.

On August 11, 1942, he was back on Malta, this time to assume command of No. 69 Squadron with the rank of Squadron Leader. He flew there in a Spitfire V for such had been his admiration for this aircraft that he had pushed and pushed that with its high speed and manoeuvrability, it was the only aircraft to get the right results in photo-recce missions. He found the islanders slowly crumbling through lack of food and many more essentials. No convoy had reached Malta for some considerable time and by August it was within weeks of being forced to surrender. A large convoy was set up to try to force a way through the Mediterranean from Gibraltar. It consisted of 14 merchantmen loaded with food, fuel and ammunition together with a naval escort of tremendous size: no less than 52 capital ships plus nine submarines on constant patrol close to the convoy. Code-named 'Pedestal', it was Malta's last hope for survival.

Warburton immediately began photographing what was left of the Italian fleet in Taranto lest they put to sea to intercept the convoy. He also photographed the Luftwaffe in their Sicilian strongholds but all of this did not prevent 'Pedestal' from taking a dreadful mauling at the hands of the enemy. Of the original 14 merchantmen, only five made it to Malta, among them the tanker *Ohio* with its precious cargo of fuel which managed to limp into Grand Harbour on August 15, propped up either side by naval destroyers. At great cost, the island had been saved for the time being.

Warburton continued to distinguish himself by his extraordinary actions. In October 1942, he was photographing a bombing raid on an Italian convoy when he noticed a fighter-bomber being shot down and the two crew scrambling to save themselves on a dinghy ten miles away from the enemy ships. Seeing their plight, he began circling around an Italian destroyer, waggling his wings in a friendly manner, in order to direct it to the dinghy. Although fired upon by the destroyer and engaged by Italian aircraft, he remained over the area until he observed the drifting airmen being picked up by the vessel. This action earned Warburton his second Bar to his DFC.

On November 15, while on a photo mission to Bizerta in Tunisia, he was attacked by Me 109s. His aircraft was damaged but somehow he managed to struggle on as far as Bône in French Algeria and get down without injury. There he was kept under lock and key for two days, suspected of being a German agent. When he finally convinced them that he was British, the French gave him an aircraft to fly to Gibraltar. There he changed it for a Spitfire and flew back to Bône to pick up his cameras and films before finally returning to Malta. On the way, he encountered two Ju 88s, destroying one and damaging the other. When at last he landed at Malta, where he had been believed missing, his first remark was — allegedly — 'sorry, I'm late.'

The expansion of the PR activities in the Mediterranean forced No. 69 Squadron to give up their 'B' Flight in order to form another photo-recce squadron, No. 683, which was formed on February 8, 1943. Fifty-two ground crew were transferred from the original squadron and command of the new unit was given to Warburton.

In March 1943, he returned to the UK for a rest but he was back on Malta at the end of the month flying a new PR Spitfire, the XI.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal, Chief of the Air Staff, talking to Warburton during a visit to Malta in 1943. (IWM)

Around this time, the plans for the invasion of Sicily — Operation 'Husky' — were being formulated and No. 683 Squadron was joined by a detachment of six American Lightning F4s and F5As (the photo-reconnaissance version of the twin-tail P-38) from the US 3rd Photographic Group. They were on Malta specifically for photo-reconnaissance work in connection with 'Husky' and it was the duty of newly-promoted Wing Commander Warburton to train the American pilots. Flying one of the Lightnings, he demonstrated to them how to achieve good photos. Soon, both No. 683 Squadron (and its sister squadron, No. 682) and the Americans were daily flying missions over Sicily to obtain coverage of all the proposed landing beaches in the south-east corner of the island. By the end of March, after 50 sorties from Malta, the task was complete. The 3rd Photo Group was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Elliott Roosevelt, the son of the US president, and he and Warburton became good friends.

In March 1943, a detachment of six American Lightnings of the US 3rd Photo Group arrived in Malta to undertake photo-reconnaissance of Sicily in preparation of the planned Allied invasion of that island. Here a Lightning of the unit, piloted by Lieutenant Berry, arrives back at base after a reconnaissance flight over Italy. (IWM)

Being *the* expert photo-recce ace on the island, Warburton was asked to instruct the American pilots on the finesses of taking good aerial photographs. Here he poses in typical attire on the wing of one of the Lightnings. (IWM)

Warburton sees the controls of a Lightning for the first time although he would soon become a crack handler of the type. The American pilot explaining the working of the cockpit to him is Lieutenant Scalpone. (IWM)

Posing with the Americans. L-R: Lieutenants German, Spencer and Scalpone; Warburton, Lieutenants Webb, Sugg and Berry. (IWM)

Another narrow escape for Warburton. On July 6, 1943, while taking off in this 3rd Photo Group P-38 from La Marsa in Tunisia, one of his turbo engines ran away causing the aircraft to veer wildly off the runway. Warburton had the undercarriage on 'automatic retraction' and the bouncing over the rough terrain caused the gear to fully retract, leading to a belly landing. The aircraft caught fire but Warburton miraculously escaped unhurt. Twenty minutes later he was taking off in another aircraft.

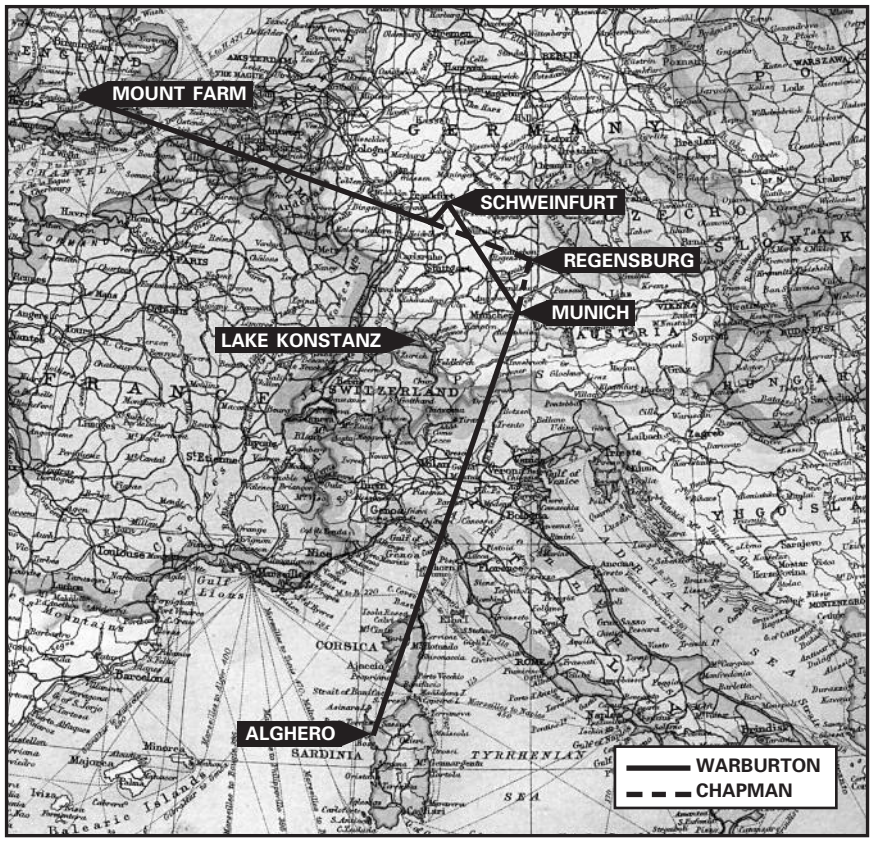
On May 18, Warburton took low-level obliques of the whole coastline of the Italian fortress island of Pantelleria from a height of 200 feet. Though continuously fired on by the island's anti-aircraft batteries, he came back with photos that proved invaluable for the invasion of the island on June 11.

For Warburton, his days now consisted of flights to Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli, mainly for conferences to do with 'Husky'. On July 6, he was involved in a flying accident that could easily have cost him his life. While taking off from the US 3rd Photo Group base at La Marsa in Tunisia, his P-38 crash-landed due to mechanical failure. The aircraft was destroyed by fire but Warburton leapt clear of the aircraft before the flames reached the cockpit. Unperturbed, within 20 minutes he had borrowed another Lightning and taken off with it, leaving the Americans in amazed admiration.

'Husky' was launched on July 9/10, 1943 (see *After the Battle* No. 77) and, despite another near-fatal incident when the US Navy tried to shoot his Spitfire out of the sky, Warburton accompanied the landings and photographed their progress. The operation was a great success and all Malta rejoiced when the Italian Navy surrendered on September 8 and three days later dropped anchor in St Paul's Bay. In August, Warburton was awarded a Bar to his DSO.

In October 1943 he left Malta for the last time, relinquishing command of No. 683 Squadron and returning to the UK for a leave period. Now aged 25, later that month he was posted to North Africa where he was given command of No. 336 Photo Reconnaissance Wing, a new headquarters set up to coordinate the efforts of Nos. 680, 682 and 683 (PR) Squadrons. For his part in the Pantelleria operation, the Americans awarded him their own DFC. On November 26, he was involved in a serious road accident when he drove his Jeep (a present from Elliott Roosevelt) off the road and he spent several weeks in hospital with a broken pelvis. Recovery took much longer than expected and a gloom of depression descended over Warburton. His time in Africa was not the same as Malta and much of the fun had gone out of his life. In January 1944, he was sent home to England to recover from his injuries.

On April 1, through the intermediation of Elliott Roosevelt, who now commanded the 8th Reconnaissance Wing (Provisional) in the Eighth Air Force, he was posted as RAF Liaison Officer to the US 7th Photographic Reconnaissance Group, who were based at Mount Farm in Oxfordshire (see *Airfields of the Eighth Then and Now*). Due to his injuries Warburton was still grounded, and his new job held little excitement for him.

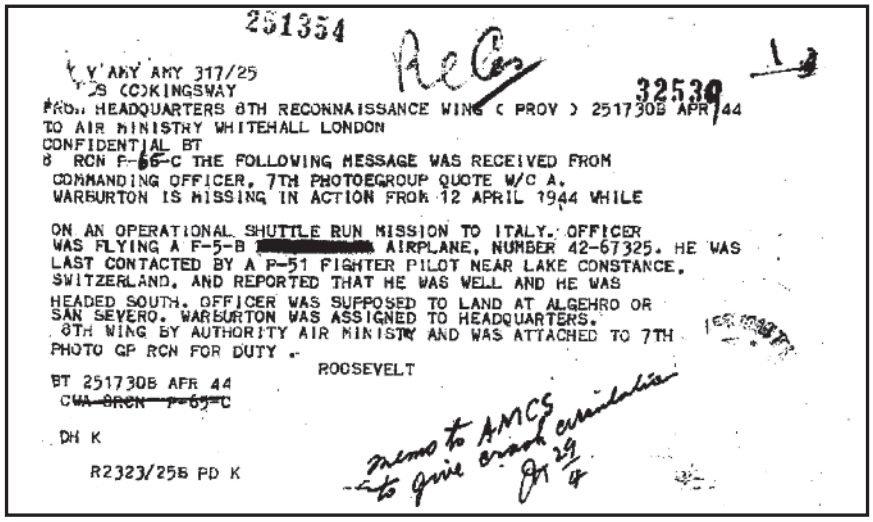


Having survived several near scrapes while in the air, it was on terra firma that Warby finally came to grief. He was injured in a car accident in November 1943 and became very depressed by his slow recovery. Warburton returned to Britain in January 1944 where his friend Colonel Elliott Roosevelt secured him a posting as British Liaison Officer with the US 7th Photo Group at Mount Farm. Despite the fact that he was still officially unfit to fly, on April 12 Roosevelt allowed him to go on a combat mission to Germany with Captain Carl Chapman — a mission from which he never returned. The map shows their intended flight plan.

However, although he was not supposed to fly, and certainly not on operations, on April 12, he left Mount Farm in a Lightning F5B-1LO (42-67325) to carry out a photographic mission over southern Germany in company with another Lightning F5, piloted by Captain Carl Chapman of the 22nd Photo Squadron. Chapman, who was a buddy of Warburton, had secured personal approval from Colonel Roosevelt for Warburton to accompany him on the mission. Roosevelt had conceded hoping it might help his friend to get back to his former cheerful self. The flight plan was for the two aircraft to fly together to a point 100 miles north of Munich where they would split to photograph different areas of damage caused by Allied bombing, Chapman going to Regensburg and Warburton to Schweinfurt. Continuing to the Czech border to photograph other targets, they were then to rendezvous with each other over Munich and together fly to Alghero airfield in Sardinia for refuelling and then fly back to Mount Farm. Eight P-51s of the 357th Fighter Group were assigned to escort the two photo aircraft.

In the event it all went quite differently. Only two of the P-51s were able to keep up with the faster Lightnings. And Warburton never kept that rendezvous with Chapman over Munich. Arriving there at the appointed time, Chapman called him on the radio many times but there was no reply so after waiting around for a while Chapman flew on to Sardinia alone. An unnamed American P-51 pilot was later reported as having last spoken with Warburton near Lake Konstanz, on the German-Swiss border, and then having seen him continue on his southward flight alone. But Warburton never reached Alghero. He just disappeared without a trace.

When he failed to return there were immediate recriminations. Had he been fit enough to fly? Did he crash into the Alps? Was he so depressed that he killed himself? Some said that he was tired of his dull life with the thrill of Malta long gone and that he just flew himself into a hillside. Others assumed that he was attempting to fly back to his beloved island and just dropped out of the sky through lack of fuel.



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TO AIR MINISTRY WHITEHALL LONDON
CONFIDENTIAL BT
8 RCN P-66-C THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE WAS RECEIVED FROM
COMMANDING OFFICER, 7TH PHOTOGROUP QUOTE W/C A.
WARBURTON IS MISSING IN ACTION FROM 12 APRIL 1944 WHILE

ON AN OPERATIONAL SHUTTLE RUN MISSION TO ITALY. OFFICER
WAS FLYING A F-5-B [redacted] AIRPLANE, NUMBER 42-67325. HE WAS
LAST CONTACTED BY A P-51 FIGHTER PILOT NEAR LAKE CONSTANCE,
SWITZERLAND, AND REPORTED THAT HE WAS WELL AND HE WAS
HEADED SOUTH. OFFICER WAS SUPPOSED TO LAND AT ALGEHRO OR
SAN SEVERO. WARBURTON WAS ASSIGNED TO HEADQUARTERS,
8TH WING BY AUTHORITY AIR MINISTRY AND WAS ATTACHED TO 7TH
PHOTO GP RCN FOR DUTY .
ROOSEVELT

BT 2517308 APR 44
~~CWA 8RCN P-67-C~~

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memo to AMCS to give crash circulation 29/4

Colonel Roosevelt's teletype to the Air Ministry in Whitehall, dated April 25, reporting that Warburton has been posted missing in action.

On May 6, he was officially posted as 'missing in action' and all Malta mourned his loss. For Christina Ratcliffe, who had remained on the island and had become an important cog in the underground operations room at Lascaris, his loss was unbelievable. Even after he was reported missing, she still believed that he would walk through the door and back into her life. In the past he had seemed indestructible and although there were long periods in which she never saw him, somehow she always knew that he would turn up somewhere out of the blue to carry on where they had left off. When, after a very long time this did not happen, Christina came to realise that her beloved Warby had gone.

By the end of his war, Warburton had flown 390 missions and won the DSO and Bar, DFC and two Bars and the American DFC. (His widow Betty went to Buckingham Palace to collect his medals, sending them on to his mother.) Without a doubt, he was a most gifted pilot and one of the great heroes of Malta. Today the National War Museum of Malta has dedicated a corner to Warburton, and his memory lives on. Many years after the conflict was over, Christina Ratcliffe presented the museum with a tunic and his medal ribbons. She herself had been awarded the British Empire Medal for her work at Lascaris but it was evident that she had never got over the strange disappearance of Warby. Christina died alone in 1988 and was buried in a pauper's grave in Malta. She was later reburied in a marked grave courtesy of the *Times of Malta* newspaper.

The Warburton display in Malta's National War Museum at Fort St Elmo includes his medal ribbons and one of his tunics.

Christina Ratcliffe's grave in Addolorata Cemetery in Malta. She now lies in Section MA-D, Grave 4. (R. Brooks)

The smoking remains of Warburton's Lightning F5B (42-67325) after it crashed in a field at Egling-an-der-Paar in Bavaria in southern Germany on April 12, 1944. Fifty-eight years after he vanished, the mystery of Wing Commander Warburton's fate was finally solved when his aircraft was found and recovered from its crash site by a German-American team in August 2002. This unique photo, taken by an unnamed German soldier, only came to light in December 2002.

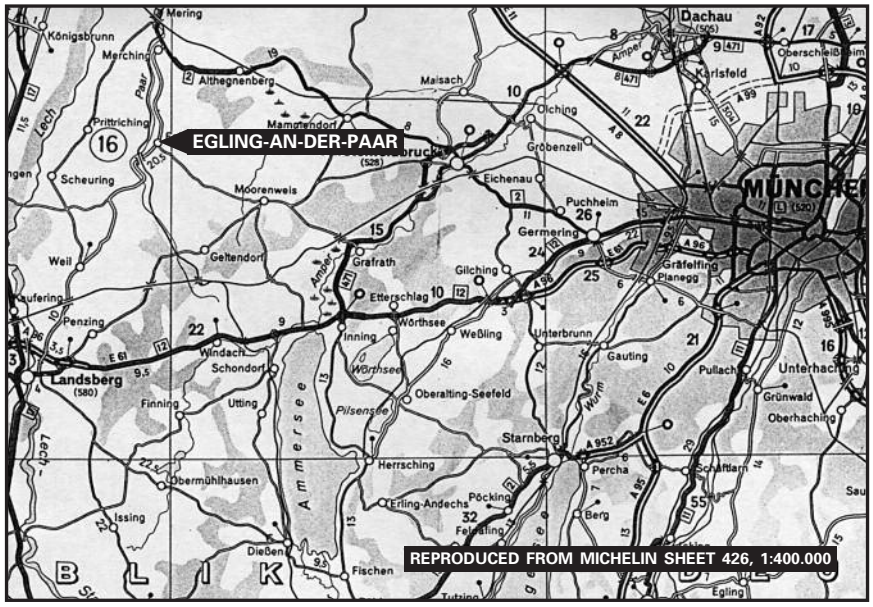
ADRIAN WARBURTON – THE MYSTERY SOLVED

By Hermann Laage and Norbert Rödel

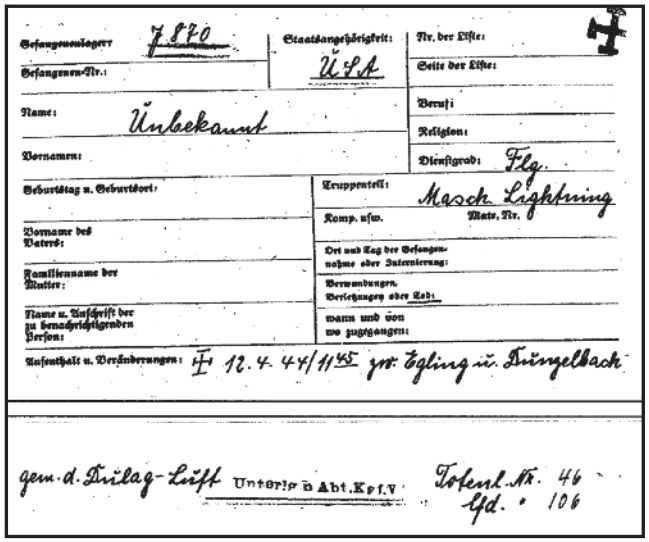
Fifty-eight years after he vanished without a trace, the mystery of Wing Commander Adrian Warburton was solved when the crash site of his aircraft was discovered at Egling-an-der-Paar in southern Germany.

It all began in 1992 when a Welsh aviation researcher, Frank G. Dorber, read the book *Warburton's War* by Tony Spooner (published in 1987). Learning of the pilot's unresolved fate, Dorber became obsessed with tracking Warburton down. He discovered that seven P-38 Lightnings had been lost over Europe on the day Warburton disappeared. Only two of these were photo-reconnaissance aircraft. Dorber decided to investigate each crash. With incredible persistence he contacted US military archives and every municipal archive, police archive and local historical association in Europe that he thought might be able to help. He matched US missing-in-action records with German anti-aircraft battery reports. With the help of other aviation experts — Hans Grimminger, Hans-Jürgen Hauprich, Rudolf Beisteiner in Germany and Austria, Henry de Zeng in the US, and Alan Brown in the UK — he was able to establish the details surrounding the loss of the various P-38s. One had been shot down by German flak near Ostend in Belgium. Another was lost near IJmuiden in the Netherlands. A third fell victim to a fighter of 5./JG53 near Mainz. The fourth had been brought down near Frankfurt-am-Main, and the fifth at Oppenheim. The sixth had been shot down south-east of Abpang on the Mariensee lake near Vienna in Austria by a fighter from 10./JG27 (this was the other PR Lightning, 42-13313 piloted by Major Emmett C. Gravitt). It was possible to account for all these losses — only one remained unresolved: a P-38 that had crashed at Egling-an-der-Paar, a small town ten miles north-east of Landsberg-am-Lech in Bavaria.

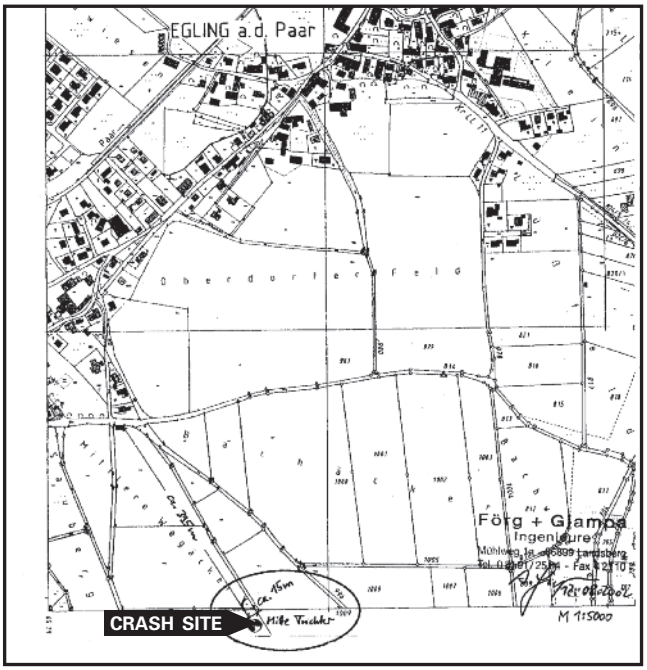
Seeking help to research this particular crash, in 2000 Dorber established contact with Professor Dr Pankraz Fried of the History Department of Augsburg University and Dr Anton Huber of the Landsberg Kreisheimatpflege (Landsberg Heritage Centre). There followed a lively exchange of views during the course of which church registers, reports and official documents were examined. Eyewitnesses of the crash were traced and interviewed, and gradually a picture emerged of what had happened on that particular day in 1944.



Warburton had been shot down by German flak, several batteries reporting having opened fire on a P-38 that must have been his. First, guns of the 2. Batterie of schwere Flak-Abteilung 571, commanded by Major Rudolf Syffert, located at Munich-Ramersdorf, claimed hits on a P-38 at 1126 hours. Then at 1445, 1. Batterie of schwere Flak-Abteilung 484, commanded by Major Peter Minn, located in and around Regensburg (65 miles north of Munich), together with schwere Heimat-Flakbatterie 211/VII Regensburg, opened up on and reported downing what was thought to be the same Lightning. However, although the kill was officially claimed by Batterie 211/VII, it appears the actual credit should go to the flak guns defending the Luftwaffe airfield at Lechfeld.



Befangenenlager: 7/VII
Staatsangehörigkeit: USA
Befangenen-Nr.:
Nr. der Liste:
Seite der Liste:
Name: Unbekannt
Vornamen:
Beruf:
Religion:
Dienstgrad: Flg.
Geburtstag u. Geburtsort:
Truppenteil: Masch. Lightning
Komp. usw.
Matr. Nr.
Vorname des Vaters:
Ort und Tag der Befangennahme oder Internierung:
Familienname der Mutter:
Verwundungen, Verletzungen oder Leid:
Name u. Anschrift der zu benachrichtigenden Person:
wann und von wo zugegangen:
Aufenthalt u. Veränderungen: I 12.4.44/11.45 pr. Egling u. Dünzelbach
gem. d. Dulag-Luft Unterlg. d. Abt. Kpf. V
Tofenl. Nr. 46
Lfd. Nr. 106



Above: **Record of Luftgaukommando VII reporting the crash of the Lightning 'at Egling near Dünzelbach'. The pilot is noted down as 'unbekannt' (unknown) but his nationality is given as 'USA'.** *Right:* **Warburton's aircraft came down in a field just south of Egling, the exact position being 48°10'35.6"N, 10°59'43.8"E.**

German records of Luftgaukommando (Air District Command) VII indicated that a P-38 had been shot down by flak on the date in question, a heavy flak battery stationed around Munich, schwere Heimatflakbatterie 211/VII, claiming the kill. However, research showed that the actual circumstances had been somewhat different. At around 1145 hours on April 12, a P-38 came in low over the Luftwaffe airfield at Lechfeld, ten miles north of Landsberg, and light flak guns at the base opened fire. Shortly after, about six miles further to the east, people in Egling saw a 'Gabelschwanzteufel' (literally 'fork-tailed devil' — the popular German name for the P-38 on account of its twin booms) approach and rapidly lose height. Coming in at a low angle, the aircraft bored itself into the field just south of Egling belonging to a farmer by the name of Braumüller. Almost immediately after the impact of the aircraft, the Feldgendarmerie arrived on the scene and cordoned off the crash site. The Germans recovered parts of the pilot's remains, but they were never able to establish his identity. Going by the fact that he had flown an American aircraft they simply recorded his nationality as 'American'. Dulag Luft, the Luftwaffe intelligence centre at Oberursel (see *After the Battle* No. 106), continued to concern itself with this aircraft right into 1945.

What could this lone P-38 at the Lechfeld airbase have been looking for? At that time, a test unit for Me262 jet fighters had just been established at Lechfeld under the command of Hauptmann Werner Thierfelder — an officer who was later to be killed in action. The jet aircraft themselves had not yet arrived, but unmistakable preparations were nevertheless underway. Lechfeld lay close to Warburton's planned flight route from Schweinfurt to Munich so it is just possible that Warburton had in addition been given the order to investigate the progress of this work — something which proved to be his undoing.

Having established the circumstances surrounding the crash, and weighed all the evidence, Dorber and his German collaborators came to the conclusion that the P-38 that crashed at Egling had to be Warburton's. In March 2001, Dorber wrote to the US Air Attache in London with precise information on the crash at Egling and advised him that the pilot was the British Liaison Officer with the US 7th Photographic Group, Wing Commander Adrian Warburton.

On May 8, 2001, the present authors — both associated with the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (German War Graves Commission) — received a fax from the US Army Memorial Affairs Activity, Europe (USAMAA-E), which is based in Landstuhl in Germany, requesting assistance in the recovery of an Allied pilot. 'We carried out our work following the established procedure in such cases — checking, cross-referencing and co-ordinating', they explain. 'In this particular case we were fortunate to make contact with Dr Huber of the Landsberg Heritage Centre. A qualified field archaeologist, he organised the excavation in such an energetic and efficient manner that it was possible to make a start as early as summer 2002. Frank Dorber was also able to clear up many unresolved points with us. As a consequence, the result of the excavation at Egling was almost a foregone conclusion. Seldom had a recovery team known so precisely in advance the object of their endeavours as was the case here.'

The recovery operation began on August 19, 2002, and lasted until the 23rd. Two mechanical diggers excavated a hole 12 metres square and three to four metres deep at the exact spot where the wreck of the P-38 was expected to be found. The removal of the upper layer of earth revealed heavy clay interspersed with stones.

It was not long before the recovery team came across a major piece of evidence left in situ following the superficial excavation in 1944 by the Germans and the subsequent investigation by the American graves registration unit in 1946: the port Alison engine. It had even been overlooked in the early 1950s when a team from the Flurbereinigungsamt (Soil Cleansing Agency) from Munich had salvaged part of the wreckage including the other engine. This discovery was followed by finding the remains of the pilot. The amount of charred bone fragments recovered was small, about 15 per cent of the skeleton, but this is typical in such cases.

Plates bearing the aircraft type and engine serial number were recovered and the details noted. This was all the more important as no pilot's ID discs or identifiable uniform parts whatsoever were found. The sole surviving article of clothing — a type A-6 flying boot — gave no clue as to its owner, since this type of footwear had been used by both the RAF and the USAAF.

August 19, 2002, and the excavation of the crash site is under way. (USAMAA-E)

In addition to sections of the nose and main undercarriage, three pallets of twisted aluminium, pumps, fuel pipes, etc were brought to the surface from a depth of three to four metres. There was also a greasy tar-like mass — the self-sealing outer skin of a fuel tank. Other pieces, such as a propeller blade with yellow lettering which had been damaged by flak splinters, seemed to bear out the theory that the aircraft had been brought down by anti-aircraft fire. The position of the engine in the ground provided no evidence of the angle of impact, because it had burrowed itself well and truly into the soil and in doing so turned on its own axis.

The cockpit of the P-38 was completely burnt out. The cockpit roof appeared to have been torn off or jettisoned for escape by parachute. The damage to the cockpit, coupled with the fact that the signal flares in the cockpit had caught fire, indicated that it had been ripped apart by a shell. Warburton may not have known what had hit him.

Informed of the finds by Hermann Laage, co-ordinator of the excavation for the German War Graves Commission, a team from the US Army Memorial Affairs Activity, Europe came to Egling on the 20th to investigate and document the site, collect artefact evidence, interview the excavation team and take custody of the human remains. It was David Roath, Chief of the USAMAA-E; Sergeant Douglas Baty of the same unit, and Hermann Laage who on the 22nd found the positive proof that we were dealing with an Lightning F5, the photo-reconnaissance version of a P-38. By the side of the carbonised remains of an aerial camera magazine they found a large roll of film. The format of the negatives was considerably larger than the negatives used in the normal combat cameras installed in ordinary P-38s. This size negatives could only have come from an aerial camera as used by photo-reconnaissance aircraft. (Lightning F5s had the American Fairchild K17 camera which used 9 x 9-inch negatives.) This was the final link in a chain of evidence for, of the two PR Lightnings lost on April 12, 1944, only one remained to be identified: that of Wing Commander Warburton.

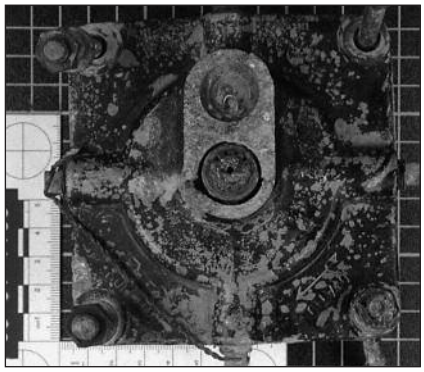
Hermann Laage (left), co-ordinator for the German Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, and David Roath (right), director of the US Army Memorial Affairs Activity, Europe, at the excavation site. (H. Laage)

Additional proof was provided by the discovery of two aircraft parts — a weight assembly of the Lightning's horizontal stabiliser/elevator and an unidentified piece of metal — that were both painted azure-blue, the typical colour characteristic of photo-reconnaissance aircraft. Also, had it been a fighter version of the P-38, the aircraft would have had machine guns. Of course, such ordnance could already have been recovered in the earlier salvage operations, but the fact that no machine guns nor any ammunition whatsoever were found provided a further indication that the Lightning had been a photo aircraft.

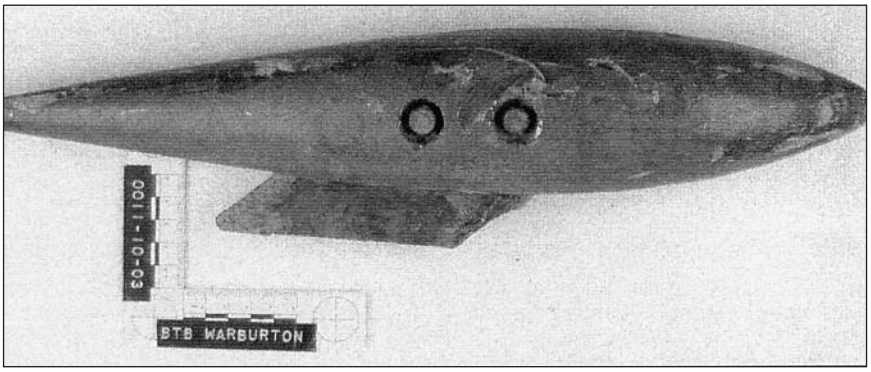
The remains of the aircraft were first taken to a garage at Egling for cleaning and further inventory of artefacts. Later they were moved to the German military airfield at Penzing. In January 2003, reporter Stephen Moyes of the *Daily Mirror* collected the wreckage and it is now at the Ridgeway Military & Aviation Research Group's museum at RAF Welford (see *UK Airfields of the Ninth Then and Now*).

Items recovered included the ID plate of the port engine.

Type A-6 flying boot, worn by pilots in both the RAF and USAAF.



Part of an hydraulic pump from one of the engines.



The horizontal elevator stabiliser still showed the light-blue paintwork characteristic of PR aircraft. (All artefact pictures courtesy of USAMAA-E.)

Prior to Warburton's funeral, the Ministry of Defence traced his widow, Betty Westcott, now 91 and living in Australia. Asked about her marriage with Warburton, she said: 'It was a wartime thing. He was incredibly young and I was simply bowled over by him. In a way we never really married. We didn't live together and I'm not sure we ever made love. He was a nice man but too young. It was all such a long time ago and yet it has opened up my life again.'

In driving rain, Mrs Westcott follows the casket as it is being carried into the CWGC cemetery at Dürnbach. (Press Association)

The human remains, which Dr Huber had handed over to the Kriminalpolizei (Criminal Police) at Fürstenfeldbruck, were passed to the USAMAA-E which sent them on to the Army's Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii (CILHI — see *After the Battle* No. 108) for examination and tests. On November 22, 2002, CILHI anthropologist Paul D. Emanovsky reported that the remains — described as consisting of 'over 100 fragments of postcranial elements ranging in size from less than 1cm to approximately 13cm' — represented one adult individual, adding that 'the well-developed muscle markings of the femur and ulna fragments as well as the overall robusticity of those elements are indicative of a male individual'. The carbonised state of the fragments made a DNA analysis impossible.

In November 2002 the remains were flown to the RAF Personnel Management Agency at RAF Innsworth in Gloucestershire, with a memorandum from the USAMAA-E giving all the evidence and concluding that the remains were believed to be Warburton's. The Ministry of Defence accepted the American conclusions and on December 16 formally announced that the remains recovered at Egling were those of Warburton. His next-of kin had been informed. One was Warburton's brother-in-law, Dr Ronald Gethen, a former Royal Navy surgeon, who married Warburton's only older sister and only sibling, Alison, in 1938. She has since died and the Gethens' three children are Warburton's closest blood relations. Later, the MoD traced Betty Westcott, Warburton's widow, now 91.

On May 14, 2003, Wing Commander Warburton was buried with full military honours at the British Military Cemetery at Dürnbach-am-Tegernsee, 30 miles south of Munich. Attending the funeral was Betty Westcott. Another one present was Jack Vowles, 81, a wartime NCO who serviced Warburton's aircraft in Malta. After a commemorative service led by Rev. Alan Coates, Chaplain of the RAF, at the St Ägidius Church at Gmund, the coffin was driven to the CWGC cemetery at nearby Dürnbach. In driving rain and hail, a brief ceremony took place. A piper's lament played as members of the Queen's Colour Squadron of the RAF lowered the coffin into the ground. Fifty-nine years after his disappearance, the RAF's most decorated Second World War pilot was finally laid to rest.

After a trumpeter from the RAF Central Band had sounded the *Last Post* and a piper had played a lament, the coffin was lowered into the ground by the members of the Queen's Colour Squadron. Standing in right foreground is Rev. Alan Coates, Chaplain of the RAF, who led the ceremony. (R. Brooks)

'Fond memories of our short time together' reads the personal inscription on Warburton's headstone. Note that his American DFC is not included. (R. Brooks)